

*11am Eucharist on the Feast of the Epiphany 2019*

**May I speak in the name of God  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

*In our darkness light has shone,  
Alleluia*

The message  
Of the feast of the Epiphany  
In six words

Epiphany  
a moment of sudden and great revelation  
the moment when we see clearly  
what is usually hidden

Light shining in the darkness

And today  
After loitering beside the altar rail  
For a few days  
The three Kings have found their way  
To the manger

We see them there  
Captured in the moment  
Described in today's Gospel

*When the Magi saw  
that the star had stopped,  
they were overwhelmed with joy  
On entering the house,  
they saw the child with Mary his mother;  
and they knelt down and paid him homage*

It is an image from this gospel  
Which has become  
Hard wired into our brains

Hard wired from  
years of attending carol services  
And nativity plays

Not to mention  
The 'unique to Chichester'  
Epiphany Procession

And yet  
When we read today's gospel  
There is no mention of three kings

For some reason this year  
And I suspect it says  
A lot about my age  
I remembered Bishop David Jenkins  
Who caused major upset in 1984

When he shared with the world  
The secret knowledge of Biblical scholars  
Which is  
that some parts of the Bible  
Are story  
Rather than historical truth

No one mentioned that he then said  
what is important  
Is God's truth revealed in the story

However I have found  
That careful reading of this passage  
reveals three kings

Or at least  
Three models of kingship  
Three models of authority

The first king we meet  
Is Herod the Great

The author of Matthew's Gospel  
Intentionally sets this story  
In a particular  
And identifiable historical period

Herod the Great  
Was appointed King of the Jews  
By the Roman senate  
In 40 BC  
And took control of Jerusalem  
A few years later

Herod was a puppet king  
far from the Jewish vision  
of the Messiah

Of a king  
Anointed by God  
To rule God's people  
A king in the line of David

Herod's authority was temporary  
Dependent on his usefulness  
To the Romans  
The occupying forces  
The real rulers of a mighty empire

The Magi then appear  
Wise men from the East

Who were the Magi?  
And when were they called Kings?

There is a reasonable consensus  
Among Biblical scholars  
That the Magi are Gentiles  
wise and enquiring men  
who are open to the possibility  
Of revelation

The Magi followed the star  
To find something new  
To see the child who was born  
King of the Jews

When the Magi became kings  
In popular Christian piety  
Is less certain  
And probably stems  
From association with the great proclamation  
In the prophesy of Isaiah  
Which we heard this morning

*But the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn*

But certainly by the middle ages  
The Magi had become three kings  
Kings with names

Their model of Kingship  
Their authority  
Comes from learning and wisdom  
People with academic curiosity  
And openness to new ideas

I suspect for many of us  
Who have grown up  
In western society  
This is a very attractive model of authority

We accompany  
the Magi on their journey

and finally encounter with them  
The third king  
A child  
In a house  
with his mother

At this point  
I can't help noticing  
The precise moment when the Magi  
Were overwhelmed with joy

It was the moment  
*When they saw the star had stopped*

Was this the joy  
of a task completed?  
The Magi had been on a journey  
And had reached the destination

The star stopping  
Was evidence  
Of the mystery  
That would be revealed  
And the Magi  
Were overwhelmed with joy  
And expectation

the Magi enter the house

And see a child  
With his mother

Now maybe this is just me  
But at this point in the story  
I am impressed by the Magi

because surely  
they expected something else  
something more obviously regal  
something less ordinary

and yet  
the Magi kneel before the child  
they pay him homage  
and they offer gifts

I think  
this is their epiphany  
their moment of revelation

not the study or the journey  
not the clever avoidance of Herod's plotting

but to clearly see  
that this child  
is the King of the Jews

This child  
they have come to seek  
is the light of the world

The wise men's openness and curiosity  
allowed them to see  
the reality that is usually hidden

and what did they see?

They saw a King  
Whose authority  
Came from God

*Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice*

Epiphany  
The festival of the Three kings

Or perhaps

Light shining into our world  
Allowing us to see clearly  
what is usually hidden

but only if we know how to look

Today's reading from the letter  
To the Christian community in Ephesus  
Recalls Paul's own Epiphany moment,

That moment of revelation  
When Paul travelled to Damascus  
And encountered Christ  
In a light from heaven

That flashed around him  
And blinded him

Paul recalls this as  
'the gift of God's grace  
that was given to me  
by the working of his power'

Paul's second revelation  
Was that his mission  
Was to take the Gospel  
To the gentiles

To share with them  
The boundless riches of Christ

*Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice*

Today is the feast of the Epiphany  
But this is not a single event

For we each have our own moments  
Of encounter with Jesus  
Moments  
When we see  
How things really are

today  
The darkness of the world  
Which Isaiah describes  
Still covers the deeper reality  
Of God's kingdom

The two types of kings  
The Herods  
The oppressive and violent rulers  
And the Magi  
The wise and thoughtful leaders

Are here  
leading nation and factions  
And may seem to be  
All that we can hope for

The gift of the feast of Epiphany  
Is the realisation  
that the birth of Jesus  
Has transformed everything

That Christ is king  
And his kingdom is here

And as Christians  
We look to him for direction  
And orientation

Today we will see Christ  
In each other  
In Scripture and in the Sacrament

And then  
We will be sent out into the world  
To share the good news of God's Kingdom

To proclaim

*In our darkness light has shone,  
Alleluia*