

Epiphany Procession Address 2020

As it was noted today in our Pew Notes, the Cathedral's Instagram account is resurrected thanks to our new communications manger, Ollie. And he's doing a great job – creative shots, photographs and content; each crafting an image and mosaic of our life here. And this, we're told, is how generation Z likes to engage with social media. Not so much the wordy updates of Facebook, which I'm afraid are now deemed to be a very middle-aged preoccupation, but rather the hungry consumption and production of images. And for those of you who use Instagram, you'll know – as do the technicians behind – that it's a hunger that is not easily satisfied: you'll know this when you realise you've somehow lost half an hour for staring broodily at pictures of puppies, for example.

In this very visual age, the Epiphany should, you'd think, be very relatable content. After all, epiphany simply means 'manifestation, revelation, or showing': this unveiling of God to the wise men from the east and so, by extension, to the entire world. But in the blizzard of images that pass us by, it's easy to take this one granted: we picture it so well from medieval art: a be-haloeed white, blond haired Jesus pointing beatifically at three men, looking very much like Venetian nobles, carrying the presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And, yet, stop awhile and look more closely. Firstly, we don't know from Matthew that it was, in fact, three men. There are three gifts, yes, but there could have been quite the convoy coming into this little village from the east. They come quite possibly not to a scene of contemplative silence as in many a crib scene, and certainly not to see royalty as they might have imagined. Instead, into this little corner of Judah, overshadowed by the mightiest empire on earth, they come to dirt, to smell, possibly screaming: a tiny baby, totally dependent, in the arms of confused and probably very uncomfortable parents. This image is God-with-us, Emmanuel, the King of Kings and Lord or Lords: wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, prince of peace: weak, vulnerable and helpless.

Do you keep scrolling or do you look again; what might it mean for us to say that this strange scene shows us how God reveals himself? Far from Temple precincts and palaces, revered first by outcasts and foreigners; cradled by the humble and the loving. When we look more closely, we might even ask ourselves, "where is God now?" and how do the wise find him today?