

St Peter's Ealing  
Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017  
Epiphany 2

Tell us what you know.

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You know, I have often pondered what ever happened to that gold, frankincense and myrrh Jesus was given by the Magi. It seems to have no impact on the families lives or standing and yet there would have been enough wealth to set them right for ages. I know they set off for Egypt and the money would have helped but that wouldn't have been the end of it. These are pretty hefty gifts. And I just wonder; if such a lottery had landed on my lap I am sure it would have made a huge difference to me.

But then we should understand the gospel writers like Matthew wrote stories. I'm not saying the gospels are fictional, but that they were written for a purpose. Matthew tells a story, which we heard last week, of some soothsayers appearing at the birth of Jesus. There is a bit more to it than that but you know the story already. And I am sure you know what Matthew was getting at, opening the mission of the church to those outside the elect. We sort of take it all for granted in some ways. And we're a bit sad it signals the end of Christmas and our return to the bleakness of winter, which is always depressing. Of course, this wasn't Matthews intention. And maybe we should be thinking more about Matthews intention than just the narrative itself.

Why has Matthew given us this in some ways wonderful and in others fantastical story of a bunch of traveling astrologers and some presents?

Looking more closely we understand Matthew starts his story of the life and ministry of Jesus by explaining who and what he believed Jesus is. Jesus is definitely human born of Mary, yet definitely divine, the son of God. The gifts offered reflect the nature of the child and its impending story (kingship; worship and death). The social standing of the visitors gives extra weight to their declarations of the nature of this child and the intervention of angels nails it.

There are echoes of prophetic readings, the Jewish reader would have already been well versed in from books such as Isaiah and Micah as well as the Psalms and Numbers. Matthew also includes echoes of the Exodus and Moses birth narrative. If we have any question of the authority and weight of this child and its arrival in the world Matthew wants to make sure we don't miss it. This is the Christ, the Son of the Living God upon the salvation of Israel has been waiting and whose coming is foretold.

John's Gospel is a little more blatant. With today's Gospel passage I have an image of John the Baptist leaning up against some wall with his sidekicks standing around and saying to them, almost as an aside, "That's the one there. The Messiah, the Lamb of God. You know, him that'll take away the sins of the worlds. The one I've been telling you about." The

Baptists declaration are to another group listening to this story. This is a story for those without an in-depth knowledge of Jewish religious literature. Who have heard of some of the titles given to Jesus but need a different approach to understanding who Jesus is. The Gospel writer gains authority for his story from firstly a known historical figure, John the Baptist, and then from the revelation given by God to John who tells us about it, "The one who sent me to baptise with water told me." And you can't get much more authoritative than that.

Epiphany is about telling us who Jesus is. It is about revealing, unwrapping, showing the person of Jesus, who Jesus is and why he is so special. That he is the Son of God, the Lamb of God. This was obviously important for the Gospel writers and was the chief aim of their writing. There is something else happening here we might miss. The gospel writers personal witness. The danger with the static word is that we might see these as static stories. What the writers are portraying are living stories that have changed their lives and they are wanting to share those life changing stories with the reader. And they want to do this because testimony is the most powerful way to share the good news of Jesus.

We have nodded and enjoyed and accepted these stories over the years. They have spoken to us, or enlightened us or even entertained us. We might even have shared our knowledge of them with others. But the point of them is not that we should reproduce them or just be touched by them but that they should give each of us an example of how to share the good news of Jesus. By expressing how God has touched our own lives, by sharing what is our own story of faith and engagement with Jesus. The other side of Epiphany from the revealing stories of Jesus in the Gospels is the sharing of the story of Jesus in our own lives.

Epiphany places before us a challenge. How is God revealed to the world in you? Matthew and John used methods that would have been understood by the people or communities they served in their own time. The writers understood their audience and wrote about the Jesus they understood. They didn't make things up. They just took the stories of Jesus and made them make sense to the world they lived in. how then do you do that? Do you even try? Have you friended the parish Facebook page? Have you connected to our twitter account? Do you Facebook or tweet? Do you mention your faith? They may seem simple innocuous things to you but they are major communication methods today (even world leaders use them and I know you have accounts). Can you help us to find other ways to communicate the good news of Jesus that would be effective in the twenty first century? Can you help us do it? How do you share your story of faith and engagement with God? If God has changed your life, how?

The twenty-first century Christian has more opportunities to share the good news of Jesus than ever before. We have the chance to share the good news and what it means to us in ways our predecessors could only dream of. God's commission to his prophets, "Listen to me...you people far away". Our task is to help everyone hear that God may speak to them too.