

Epiphany

I don't know about you, but this year I became much more aware of how different we are as people of faith when it comes to celebrating Christmas. Our commercial world seemed to mark December 25th. as the rest day between buying presents for other people and buying things for ourselves at bargain prices. I became sick of hearing of boxing day and boxing week sales. The boxing day test was spoken of in terms of a religious ritual. There was almost no talk of Christmas on radio and television after Christmas Day.

But as people of faith we have the joy of celebrating Christ's birth for nearly two weeks. We need that much time to ponder the meaning of the mystery of Christ's birth. We need that much time to begin to understand what it means for me that God has taken on our human nature; that a child has been born to be my saviour.

The stories of Christ's birth are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Each Gospel writer tells his story from a different point of view. In Luke's gospel Mary plays a very central part. In Matthew's gospel Joseph is the one that we notice more. The good news of Christ's birth is revealed to the poorest of shepherds in Luke's gospel. Christ's birth is revealed to the Magi from the east in Matthew's gospel. During the Christmas season we have the joy of listening to both Luke and Matthew and we draw life from each of their stories. In fact, the

Gospel writers tell the stories of Jesus in such a way that we become part of those stories. One of the most captivating is the story we read today. Some people ask the question right at the beginning, did this really happen? A story about Magi from the east following a star to Bethlehem does stretch our imagination. The simple answer to the question, did it really happen, is that we don't know. But once we can get past that question and enter into the story, then we have much to take from it. It is a story to be pondered and prayed with.

We are told first that, "some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east" asking the question: 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' Matthew doesn't tell us how many there were so let's include

ourselves among their number. We are invited to ask that same question that the Magi asked: Where is the infant king of the Jews? Where is Jesus in my life and in the lives of those around me?

The wise men saw signs of God's presence in the stars. Do we look for God's presence in the world that God has created? Are we filled with delight when we see signs of his goodness and beauty? Perhaps we have had the joy of visiting family over Christmas and meeting some new born grandchildren or nephews or nieces. Perhaps we have had time to stop and notice some of the beauty that surrounds us in our own gardens or in places that we have visited.

Three times in our gospel we read the word "homage". The Magi tell us, 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' Herod promised to go and give him homage too. But his intentions were far from that. It was only the Magi who when they saw the child with Mary his mother "fell on their knees and did him homage". What does it mean for us to pay homage to Jesus? During the last twelve months we have been trying to deepen our personal relationship with Jesus. Has this Christmas been different because of that?

King Herod was a man who was full of fear and was ready to do anything to protect his kingship. What he did to the children under two living in and around Bethlehem is almost too hard for us to imagine. But he did some things right. "He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born." All of us need the help of others to discover where Jesus is in our world today. The scriptures point us in the right direction, but we need holy people who know Jesus well to lead us there.

When Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately he said more than he could understand. 'Go and find out all about the child,' People of faith spent their whole lives finding out all about the child who has come into our world as our Saviour. And when we desire to deepen our faith in the Lord, then God seems to send the star that guides our way. "And there in front of them was the star they had

seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was.” And what joy it is to be lead to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is for us. “The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage.”

When we find ourselves in the presence of the one who made us and gifted us with all that we have, we cannot help but give those gifts back to the Lord of life. “Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

When we have discovered who Jesus is for us then our lives are changed. We cannot keep doing what we were doing before. “But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.”