

Homily. Solemnity of the Epiphany. 6/7 January 2024.

The wise men were what we today would call ancient astronomers. They traced their skills and knowledge back to those who built the great old astronomical stone circles and so many other monuments to chart the sky and seasons. From patient and attentive observations these men from the East saw the rising of a new significant star. We don't know for certain what this new bright light was; a comet, a supernovae explosion or other eye catching celestial event? We do know that they not only saw its advent but interpreted its meaning to be the birth of a new King in Israel.

This led these foreigners, pagans who worshipped many gods, to set out on a long and challenging journey. They traveled across trackless desert wastes, through scattered oasis's and strange towns full of people they'd never known existed guided only by this new heavenly light. Eventually, they crossed the Jordan River and ascended the hills to Jerusalem, arriving at the court of King Herod the Great, someone at the least that they most certainly would have heard about. With a plot hatching in Herod's paranoid mind, he sent them on the Bethlehem just 8km away.

The star rested over the place of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It manifested and showed this new born King's home to them, an odd place indeed for a king. According to St. Matthew, it was a humble house in a little village of likely no more than a few hundred persons. There they opened and offered their gifts; gold fit for a royalty, frankincense for a priestly and prayerful servant of God and myrrh used to anoint the dead before burial.

These gifts, too, manifested and revealed God's will and Jesus destiny.

The child was a King indeed, the best sort, one so very different to that of scared and scheming Herod. Jesus Kingship would be a life of service, prayer and offering to God's glory, not for his own comfort and pleasure, ending rather in the sacrifice of his very life so as to save his people.

I wonder what Mary and Joseph made of this homage and of these gifts? What meaning did they perceive in these travellers with their offerings? What message from God did they discern in this event, for them, for their son and for the future of God's people?

Today we see in the wise men the story of the whole world. They were the first pagans ever to come to recognise Jesus and his importance, not just for Israel and the Jews, but for all people in all of the world. We are their spiritual ancestors in the sense that, though we aren't Jewish, we have come to believe in Jesus of Bethlehem and Nazareth as God's Messiah, the crucified servant Christ the King and Saviour given for the life of all.

One day all nations, so shattered and broken as we are today, will come to adore him. For now we pray for God's light and wisdom; that the heavenly light of the Lord may go before us always and everywhere, so that we may perceive with clear sight and revere with true affection the mystery in which God has willed us to participate, a great mystery and wonder which happens here again and again in the Eucharist we share and celebrate, the foretaste and the promise of all God has in store for us.