

**Immanuel, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2023**  
**Matthew 2; 1-12**

### **The fourth gift**

Friday was the feast of Epiphany – this is not necessarily a theological word, it simply means a time of great realization, becoming aware of something one didn't know before, though since this reading in Matthew is seems to be reserved to religion: the Magi's encounter with the new born baby Jesus – the Messiah.

The reading today shows us the tensions that still are around today causing so much hurt. The struggle of rulers to hold a strong grip of their power. The widening of boundaries that seem to challenge the mentality of exclusiveness. The reality that God's vision is far more extensive than ours. And how all this has true effects on daily living.

The Magi, come from “outside” the accepted boundaries. They come from the East. Later on in history these boundaries will widen even more, with Pentecost, with the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Kingdom....were they ever out of it? We read of how the powerful exclude – the Magi return home by a different route, Joseph, Mary and Jesus have to run for their life to a foreign country. The biblical narrative is similar to the news we read today. What is God doing in all this? Well God is teaching us to open our arms, our mind, our arms, and our heart.

The narrative we have just read tells us about the Wise Men, the Kings, the Magi and their gifts – three gifts. For many years I have wondered what happened with those gifts? How were they used, because we never hear of them again. But these gifts do not seem central to the story. The heart of the narrative is the action of “paying him homage”...this is mentioned three times, twice in true sincerity and once as a total LIE. We know how words can be used with totally different meanings.

The Magi are on this journey, which is the same each of us is doing – the journey of life. They come from the East, on a mission: to honour the child; the child which is recognised by those of the wider world, but not the closed reality of the traditional set up, and seems to be ignored by those who should have known and cared. The narrative shows how strangers are the opening and closing of the story. God, in the child, had breached the boundaries of traditional faith.

The prostration is the action which speaks of ‘self-giving’, showing up the very different intentions of Herod, who does not care about this, this is made clear when he discovers that the Magi don't return to tell him the place of the baby, so he orders the massacre of all under 2's. Herod's rule is based on violence and fear, not one of prostration, as we continue to see in the Herod's of the world today.

The Magi reach the place of the baby, guided by the star, and they do the greatest of things: they kneel down and pay him homage. They are giving of themselves to the Messiah. The three gifts are absolutely secondary, and this is probably the answer to my initial question of why they are never mentioned again! The order in which all this happens is central.

Gifts often are used as instruments of outshining the other, as on state occasions, when rulers exchange gifts. It is never an act of humiliation, of self-giving, rather of my gift is bigger than your gift. We are called to be different, our call is to worship, to pay homage, and only then offering a gift. But what is the real gifts if not the homage, the self-giving, not the gold, the myrrh. The gift of Jesus are the bread and the cup we share today.

This self-giving is what makes the Magi have to go back home a different way, it is what leads Joseph, Mary and Jesus to flee to Egypt. They are in danger. The challenge we face is to see that the Magi's fourth gift is really their first gift: paying homage to Christ. So what are we presenting to the new born child as our gift this season? Which is our first gift? Things will be different when we get our gift right.