



The Feast of the Epiphany

Homily by Fr Robbie Low

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6, Ps 72, Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6, Matthew 2: 1-12

One of my favourite Christmas cards of recent years is the mildly feminist greeting in which a beautiful and well turned out young woman is looking at us over her shoulder with the dismissive quote:

‘Three wise Men? Be Serious’.

She’s not far wrong.

I’ve noticed over the last few years that the most popular scene on Christmas cards received, amongst those who send a religious card, is the last stage of the journey of the Magi, the Wise Men of Matthew’s Gospel, as, camel borne, they gaze down upon the little town of Bethlehem, illuminated by that strange prophetic star.

The Wise Men fascinate us still.

It is a mixture of beauty and distance and it is clearly a scene which resonates with us. We are too far away to share the intimacy of the shepherds. We are nervous about their instantaneous response and evangelical hearts. We are unfamiliar with their simplicity. We are on our weary way, the long route, by virtue of our rational, post-enlightenment scientific enquiry, if we are under way at all. We do not know yet to what we are coming. We have already made a serious mis-step by going via the palaces of secular monarchy, the Herodian error, and shipping up at the state church, thus overriding our study and our hard gained wisdom by preferring cultural norms to divine revelation. And now, with the Magi, the Kings, the Wise Men, we are nearly there – the unlikely shambles of a stable doorway, a peasant girl with newborn in her arms and none of the showy dignity and sparkling self-glorification of the human court. Was it really for this that we travelled this far? That a cosmic sign of

such magnitude should lead to a scene of such apparent historic insignificance is a challenge to our reason and our wit.

And so we ride on in hope, burdened by our knowledge and our gifts of great import, puzzled by the very strangeness of God's ultimate revelation.

Like children, how often do our impatient hearts call out, 'Are we nearly there yet?'

With the Magi, we surrender our human wisdom to the revelation of the Divine. What can we know who know so little except, as we age, only the immensity of what we do not know.

With the Kings we surrender our self- sovereignty, in this most unlikely court, to the newborn King of kings.

At his feet we kneel and offer the Gold, the human currency by which we recognise ultimate worth and value, the hallmark of monarchy – the One above all.

The exotic fragrance of the white pearls of Frankincense, the acknowledgement both of the immanence of Divinity and of the go-between who is the great High Priest at the altar of the Sacrifice.

And, all unexpected and that against which our souls cry out in lifelong protest, that dark shining crystalline preservative in death, the Myrrh of our mortality – sign of our mortal end and prophecy of this Star Child's destiny to overturn that universal doom of fallen Man by His encounter with and His defeat of Death by the invincible infusion of His Divinity.

As we kneel before the Lord of all, this one and only and ever INCARNATUS EST, God in Man made manifest, and offer our gifts of mystic meaning and eternal import, we know that, like the Magi, the Wise Men of old, we shall not be the same long travellers who came, we will be changed, and, angel warned or not, we will, needs must, return to our own country by another Way.