



The Diocese of
Southwark

Season of Lay Ministries

All Age Talk: Wise Men - Epiphany

Resources:

Story Bag/Sack containing:

Star

Crown

Present

Toilet roll

Introduction

Today we celebrate Epiphany and I have this bag that contains some clues about our bible story? Can I have 3 volunteers to come and have a look in my bag?

[EACH CHILD PULLS ONE ITEM OUT OF THE BAG]

Star - Who likes gazing at the stars? I love looking at the stars on a clear night it gives me a sense of awe and wonder of something much bigger than I, of our creator who put each star in its place.

Crown - Who wears a crown? A king - I wonder if there is a king in our story.

Present - I love receiving presents what did you receive this Christmas?

Ask the congregation: Have you guessed? What is our bible story about today?

Wise men visiting Jesus.

Main Talk

So, who were the wise men? We usually have 3 of them in our Nativity scene and on Christmas cards but there is no reason to assume that they were necessarily 3, they were kings or that we know their names.

Matthew refers to them as Magi. For centuries the Magi had been a tribe of priests in Persia, but the name had also become applied to magicians and astrologers, interpreters of signs. We know what they were not, they were not of Jewish descent but instead Gentiles (non Jews) And they were the first to fulfil Isaiah's 60:3 prophecy 'Nations will come to your light and Kings to the Brightness of your dawn.' The Magi were the very first Gentiles to worship Jesus.

So, what did they see? **[HOLD UP THE STAR]**

In the ancient world most people believed in astrology and believed that the stars could indicate the future. The steady courses of the heavenly bodies represented the settled order of the universe therefore when some great astrological event occurred it was reasonable to assume that God was breaking through the normal order of things. Add to this the fact that a star formed part of the Jewish prophecy of a Messiah from Balaam 'I see him, but not now; I behold him but not nearby. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel'. But what did they see in the sky that night that led them on this long and dangerous journey, that made them persevere through no doubt many hardships. There have been many suggestions including Haley's Comet but most probable is that this was not one new star but the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the area of the sky known as Pisces. Excitingly this conjunction of the planets is recorded around the time of Jesus' birth in an early inscription from the observatory of Sippar in Babylonia. Pisces was reckoned by astronomers to mark the end of the sun's old course and beginning of something new. Jupiter was the royal planet and Saturn had long been the symbol of Israel. So, this conjunction of planets, giving the impression of one very bright star, would have meant to the competent astronomer that a new age was beginning, in which the sovereignty would shift to Judea. Jerusalem was the capital of Judea and so natural that the Magi would go there first.

[HOLD UP THE CROWN]

And so, they come in search of Royalty a New King of the Jews and they head first to Herod's palace in Jerusalem. A palace is where you would expect a King to be born no? Herod who was currently in power and liking it very much was clearly very disturbed to hear of a new King, his response in contrast to the Magi who came to worship this new King was one of hatred and fear. Hatred of anything that threatened his current position and fear of a possible rival, lust for power overcame everything, this is something that continues to corrupt to this day.

Then we look at the Jewish priests and scribes their attitude was amazing, in contrast to how the Magi sought this king wholeheartedly. Despite the fact they knew their scriptures and were able to answer and tell Herod that the king would be born in Bethlehem by quoting the prophet Micah 5:2, they did not lift a sandal to go and greet him. They knew it all and yet they did nothing, their apathy hardened into opposition to Jesus as his ministry grew and ended with their desire to kill him on the cross. Knowledge was no substitute for the heart felt obedience and perseverance of the Magi.

The bible tells us in Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me, and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart.

I wonder...Do you seek Jesus as your King? Or Are you fearful like Herod, afraid of the changes that might take place in your life if you acknowledge him? Or are you unmoved like the Jewish priests with knowledge but no heartfelt obedience? But maybe you are like the Magi who search against all odds to find and worship the king?

So, after a long journey and detours these Magi continue to Bethlehem and find their king not in a palace but in a lowly house (not a stable) with a teenage mother and a carpenter father. Matthew tells us they find a child not a baby The Greek word used is paidion, which means "toddler," so Jesus would have been older by the time the Magi arrived. Their star assisted search has led them to the world's

deliverer, the source of true wisdom. Life's meaning is not written in the stars after all, astrology and horoscopes cannot crack the code. For all stars and signs point to Jesus and in Him alone is our true eternal destiny spelled out for us.

[HOLD UP THE PRESENT]

They came to worship and this they do bringing gifts of Gold Frankincense and Myrrh. Unusual gifts for a child but how significant these gifts were, when we look at the whole story of the Gospel.

Gold for a King for Jesus this child was Emmanuel God with us - the King of God's

Kingdom [HOLD UP THE CROWN]

Frankincense, this was used by priests in the temple and Jesus was to be the ultimate priest the one who would make the final reconciliation between man and God.

Myrrh this was used to embalm the dead. The man born to be King was born to die for us, for you. He came to die, to save us, to pay the price for us for the things we do wrong, so through faith in him we could receive forgiveness and eternal life.

I wonder which of these gifts was the most important? Each gift points to Jesus who he is and what he came to do? Yet I think the most important gift they brought to Jesus that day was themselves These Magi travelled far and persevered through many hardships to worship Jesus, they did not know where their journey would lead them, but they were in search of a king that would one day save the world.

I wonder what gift you would bring to Jesus today; you may not have anything fit for a King and yet you have your self and that is the best gift of all.

Do not be like Herod afraid or the Jewish Priests unmoved, be like the Magi determined seeking Jesus against all hardships and distance.

So, what do we mean when we say bring ourselves? Can you gift wrap your self?

[ASK FOR A CHILD TO VOLUNTEER AND WRAP THEM USING TOILET PAPER]

Hmmm not very practical! Fun but I don't think we need to gift wrap ourselves.

But you can bring yourself in worship, you can commit for this New Year to come to church, to gather and worship Jesus. Make this your New Years Resolution.

You can bring your gifts and talents to help others and serve as part of the Church community reaching out into the local community sharing the good news. You can help to build God's Kingdom. Not out of duty but in response to a God that loves us so much he sent his son, born in a manger to die on a cross, not to judge the world but to save it. He sent Jesus to be the light of the world to cast out darkness, will you bring yourself to shine his light to the world. Will you bring yourself to point the way to Him.

This is the start of the Season of Lay Ministry, it is a time to reflect and consider how God is calling each one of us, it's an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God, to learn more and to serve him. On Saturday 27th January there is a **Lay Ministry Taster day** Trinity House 10-2pm come along and find out more about the different types of ministries such as Pastoral, Pioneer, Reader and Children and Young people and more. Explore the opportunities for training and join in some fun CYP activities for all ages including tea and donuts (all the family is welcome)! Be inspired to sign up for a course and take a step forward with your chosen Ministry.