

## Devotional Blog

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021

2020 has gone. Good riddance many will say! In a few days, the Christmas season will also be over. By the 6<sup>th</sup> January, all the decorations, the tree, the tinsel, and the lights will need to be safely packed away for another (hopefully better) year.

We Christians use a special word for this point in the year, it's Epiphany. It means the appearance of the divine. Funnily enough we seem to be reworking a part of the Christmas story that has featured back when the kids were doing their nativity plays. It's the story that gave us the much-loved carol "We three Kings of Orient are..." Yes, it's the visit of the Magi, the Wise Men.

Now it's possible to poke fun at the way this story is portrayed in nativity plays. We can be very clever and point out that the visitors weren't Kings; they never came to the stable or even the inn; and there's nothing to say that there were three of them.

But no one can blame schoolteachers and Junior church leaders from ensuring that there are as many roles as possible in the Christmas drama. Blending the birth stories from both Luke and Matthew's Gospels does another important job.

When you listen to a long piece of music you often get a "prelude" at the beginning. The prelude gives you a taste of the tunes and melodies in the fuller piece. The birth stories work like that too. Matthew uses the tale of the Magi to link both back to the old book of Isaiah (Isaiah 60:1-6) and forward to the end of his Gospel with the great sending out of disciples to all nations (Matthew 28:18).

Let's be relaxed about the retelling of this lovely story and maybe concentrate on two elements. Firstly, although Matthew is a bit

vague on who the Magi were, one thing is clear they were gentiles. Yes, pagan gentiles searching for a Jewish King. They are representing the universal call to God's Kingdom.

The second point to note is that the Magi bring four gifts with them. Four gifts? Yes, four, and the fourth is the most important!

The key to understanding this fourth gift is a word that occurs at the beginning of the Bible passage (Matthew 2:1-12), again in the middle and yet again at the end. The word is translated as "pay him homage".

This is the purpose of the story of the Magi.

In ancient times homage entailed prostrating yourself at the feet of the King. Nowadays, many Bible translations use the word "worship" instead.

Matthew clearly uses a piece of irony when King Herod expresses his desire to pay homage to the baby King.

We see that it is only after the act of worship, only after giving themselves completely to Christ that the Wise men present their material gifts.

So, the fourth gift of worship is really the first gift! And that's how it should be with us.

You see, the Magi are in the birth story because they represent us. We have our own talents and material gifts for God to use but first we need to give our worship to the one who died for us, redeemed our wrongdoing, saved us so we can have everlasting life.

There's the equivalent of a guiding star shining just for you. It's called the Holy Spirit.

Go forward into this new year brothers and sisters and continue to search for Christ. Yes, bring your gifts and talents. And when you

meet him, whenever, wherever, quietly start your relationship with him by saying “I have come to worship the King”.

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