

## THE EPIPHANY JOURNEY

Matthew 2:1-12 [MW19-01]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 06 January 2019

Over the Christmas holidays a grandmother brought her visiting grandson to church

- he hadn't been to church much so he had lots of questions  
whispers to grandmother, what does it mean when they pass that bag around?  
grandmother replies, it means people are giving their donations as gifts to God
- whispers again, what does it mean when they put that stuff on the altar?  
grandmother replies, the vicar will say some words and that bread and wine  
will become for us the body and blood of Christ
- whispers again what does it mean when the vicar waves his hand like that?  
grandmother replies, he is giving us a blessing
- whispers again, what does it mean when the vicar takes off his watch  
and puts it on the pulpit  
grandmother replies, absolutely nothing dear! Absolutely nothing!

There are many questions

- some of great and eternal importance, others of little consequence  
one of the former is just what does "Epiphany" mean?
- you may be aware that "Epiphany" means "revelation"  
a showing, a direction for our search
- and interestingly the scriptures imply it is a search everyone must make

Luke in his gospel has the poor searching – in the form of shepherds

- Matthew in his gospel has the rich and learned searching  
in the form of wise men
- so the message is there is room for everybody in this search  
from no degrees to PhDs, shepherds to executives

In our gospel reading this morning we heard the story of a search

- and of two very different and distinct sets of "wise men"  
the first set are the ones often called "the Magi"  
and they have been given wonderfully exotic names:  
Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar
- the second set of wise men is the group Herod called in  
the chief priests and teachers of the Law

King Herod says "I have a problem"

- what do you do when you have a problem?  
you call in the experts
- so King Herod gathered his wise men  
and asked them where the Messiah was to be born
- these wise men, of course, came up with the answer:  
*"In Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote"*

And that's all we hear of them, this group of wise men

- except when this story is told, we never hear of these wise men  
why is that?
- well, like so many, and unlike the Magi, their hearts do not follow their heads  
they give lip service only

Like saying:

- I have to look into this God thing – someday
- I have to try and figure out life’s meaning – someday
- I need to be kinder and more forgiving – someday
- Life is fundamentally about relationships and not possessions
- I need to remember that ... someday ...

That set of wise men that Herod called in and called on

- remained aloof from life and aloof from risk
- there was a risk, because, suppose they had gone on the journey and had found the Messiah
- what changes might they have had to make in their lives?
- so they concluded it was better to talk about all this than do something about it

Then there are that other set – the Magi – who took a risk

- and it was a real risk
- there was the risk of inquiry: who knew what they might learn?
- there was the risk of journey: who knew what they might meet
- and there was the risk of search: who knew what they might find?
- or better still, *whom* they might find?

This morning’s gospel is not just a colourful story

- conjuring up images of oriental kings sailing over desert sands
- this gospel is in fact a challenge
- asking us to choose between two types of wise men
- to choose between those who play it safe and those who take the risk
- between those who sit around and talk
- about becoming holier, better, deeper, more profound lovers of God
- and those who go out and do something about it

That’s where there is a question linked to this gospel of the wise men

- a question and an invitation
- what about you and me? where do we fit into this gospel story?
- where are we in the Epiphany?

The first part of an answer, I think, is this

- we are part of a community, a church, a caravan
- (a ‘caravan’ in the desert and camel sense, nothing to do with cars and camping)
- there is great wisdom in this
- great wisdom in being part of a ‘caravan’
- because no one on this earth can successfully journey alone
- we need each other’s guidance, we need each other’s balance
- and we need each other’s encouragement

The second part of this is that being on a common journey in a caravan

- helps us to realise that we are in different spaces on this journey
- some of us are way up front
- some of us are willing
- some of us are dragging our feet

Some of us journey with great certainty

- having found Jesus and looked into the face of the Messiah while others journey with great doubt still trying to deal with fundamental questions
- questions of sickness and death and hurt and broken relationships and all the things that say there can't be a God if God is the one who allows wars and AIDS and cancer

We have those who are veteran seekers

- and those who are newcomers to this caravan it's not important where we are in this caravan what is important is to respond to the invitation to join and go on the journey
- being on the journey responding to the gospel taking the risk
- that is what Epiphany is all about joining this "caravan community" where those of us who are vigorous and excited can support those who are tired, weary or just plain discouraged

It means we don't have to do it all by ourselves

- those of us who are so certain can encourage those of us who are struggling those who wrestle with doubts about faith, about God, about life, about love
- those of us who are devout can be a sign to those of us who are tepid and lukewarm
- those who are young and innocent can signal hope to those who have borne the long journey

Epiphany is an invitation, a journey, a risk, an encouragement

- and above all a celebration of hope we can give each other courage and strength

As we look around our caravan

- we have children and we have octogenarians we have students and teachers we have people with degrees and people with life experience
- we have people whose relationships are harmonious and people whose relationships are difficult
- we are, in short, a great mixture of "all kinds of everything" and that's just fine in fact that's what it's all about
- it doesn't matter you're part of the caravan you're journeying

And through that let us be reminded of Epiphany's promise:

- wherever we are in this caravan we will, everyone of us, reach the goal of the journey
- we too will look into the face of the Messiah

(space)

As we prepare to take down our decorations and put away our manger scene  
- for another year  
as we begin to realise that the old year has gone and the new one begins  
some words for our journey by James C. Huffstutler

### ***Song of the Magi***

*The path away  
is every bit as important as  
the path which approaches  
maybe more.*

*For we were led to God's son,  
gave him our gifts,  
and were changed forever.*

*Thus we leave  
lighter  
yet bearing a different, welcome burden.*

*What path now to follow?  
And where is home?*

Questions to journey with this coming year:  
- what path now to follow?  
and where is home?