

Epiphany - His Gift to us

Isa 60:1-6

Matt 2:1-12

Firstly may I wish you all a very happy new year. With our Christmas and new year festivities behind us maybe it's time to reflect and think about the year ahead. What are your hopes and dreams for 2026? A year of change or a calm steady time? The next step on our journey through life. New home, new job, a refurbished church! I wonder where Jesus figures in our thinking? What would it be like to draw closer to Him this year, to get to know Him better?

I recently came across this quote “ Never treat life casually, why? Because to be spiritual is to be amazed.” Yes I can see that, to believe the creator of the universe cares for me personally is definitely something to be amazed about. It doesn’t always feel that way, but I can choose to believe it.

I wonder if we can find a bit more amazement this morning as we compare our spiritual journeys with the journey of the Magi who came from the East. There are 3 words that I think are particularly relevant here.

Noticing
Recognising
Choice

The story of the magi is a key part of the Christmas story. We have this story because pagan foreigners noticed a new phenomenon in the night sky, a new bright star, they recognised its significance and chose to set off on their exciting journey. It was a huge commitment to make just on the basis of spotting a new star. These wealthy, learned men wouldn't have travelled on their own. They gathered together a sizeable entourage, camels, servants, luggage, for what would have been a very lengthy journey, several weeks at least.

They were convinced that the new star represented some very significant event taking place on earth. Ancient writings talked of a new king. “ Yes, let's go to find Him and see for ourselves ”they said.

The star was available for everyone to see. There were so many other people who could have noticed the new but why was it only the Magi who made it onto the pages of Matthew's gospel? They persevered and saw the journey through and eventually find Jesus and his parents, still in Bethlehem, and in a house, no longer a cave or stable. Jesus would have been about 18mths old by the time they accomplished their quest.

Could Matthew want us to see the journey of the Magi as a metaphor for our journey towards Jesus? While each of us has a unique path it's a journey best travelled in the company of others. Is our path straight and focussed or do we wander back and forth?

I wonder if these wise men got down hearted at times, encountering rough terrain, bandits, would they have said to each other, “why are we doing this, this is harder than I expected, I'm exhausted, I've got saddle sores and I'm longing to sleep in my own comfortable bed!” The benefit of travelling companions is that we can encourage each other when things feel tough because we don't all feel the same things at the same time.

The Christian life is hard at times. That's why we need support to help us recognise when we are moving away from Christ. The choice to turn back to Jesus and continue the journey requires effort.

So what have we noticed? Is there an equivalent of a star that have we spotted? Have we recognised something that's worth following? A star that will lead us towards Jesus or are we following celebrities, distractions that will lead us away from Him. The closer we are to Jesus the more hope we will experience. A life full of meaning and purpose. A life where we know we are deeply loved by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

The wise men finally make it, their perservance pays off. They are welcomed by Mary and Joseph, invited in. They present expensive gifts as they worship Jesus, the new king. As we approach Jesus is He expecting gifts from us?

Again we return to noticing, recognising and choice.

Giving presents is a Christmas tradition for many. The pleasure of seeing young children/grandchildren open the presents we give them, their excited, gleeful response. Many are too young to give us anything in return but we don't mind we are delighted to see their joy. Could God be like this with the gifts He gives us?

The Bible tells us that "God gives us life and breath and everything else". (Acts17)

"We all live off His generous bounty, gift after gift after gift."(John 1:16 msg)

So what gifts have we got to give Him? Following this talk we are going to sing "In the Bleak Midwinter." There's a lot to ponder in its words, especially the last verse.

"What can I give Him, Give my heart"

How can we do this? What does it mean?

The word surrender is often used when referring to following Jesus. But this isn't the surrender of giving up, defeat in battle. Its willingly offering our lives back to Jesus in recognition of all He has given us. Jesus gave His very life for us when he died on the cross.

It's easy to forget who the true giver really is. In response to the offering we frequently pray a prayer that includes the phrase "all things come from you and of your own do we give you". Everything is God's gift. The most precious gift of all is Jesus himself, God made himself man for us. Wow, that really is amazing and our natural response is gratitude.

So let's pray that we will start the year noticing more and more gifts that God gives us. As we recognise that everything we have is a gift from God, we can choose to develop an even greater attitude of gratitude, as we continue our journey together towards Jesus, allowing His love to amaze us.

Let's approach 2026 with worship instead of worry, faith instead of fear.

Amen

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