

## Homily The Epiphany Year B 2024

How do you tell people that Jesus, who came to a specific group of people expecting a Messiah, a saviour who would lead them to greatness and freedom, that their promised Messiah has come not just for them but for all people, for everyone? Matthew does this by telling the story of wise men coming from the East who followed a star that led them to Jesus. They brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Fortunately, Matthew wanted us to fill in the gaps in order for us to discover the significance and value of the story.

There is a theory that the wise men were Zoroastrians, a religion founded 600 years before Christ. Zoroastrians were a gifted group of people, highly intelligent and sophisticated and very generous. It is further thought that the wise men were Zoroastrian priests who believed that every good person has a guiding light in the heavens that appears as a star and the greater the person born the brighter the star. Since they actually worship the god of light, they believed that the very bright star that they followed would lead them to a very great person. They were certainly not wrong!!

In the early days of the Church, it was believed there were six wise men but as only three gifts are mentioned their number was reduced to just three. As psalm 72 suggested that they were kings, this belief was also adopted. Their names Balthazar, Melchior and Gaspar were taken from a 6<sup>th</sup> century mosaic in Ravenna. Among the gifts, Gold reflected the virtue of the travellers, Frankincense that they were people of prayer and the Myrrh suggested that they were willing to accept the bitterness and sacrifice necessary to make the journey in pursuit of the Holy One of Light.

An additional story spoke of the wise men representing different age groups. The young by (Gaspar), the middle-aged by (Balthazar) and the elderly by (Melchior). It also said that on reaching Bethlehem that each of them went in to meet the new Born babe individually. Melchior went in first and met an elderly man of his own age and felt very much at home with him speaking of memory and gratitude. Balthazar went in next and found a middle-aged teacher and they talked passionately about leadership and responsibility while Gaspar met a young prophet who spoke of reform and promise. They then returned together with their gifts and found only a 12-day old infant. They then understood that the Saviour, Jesus Christ, speaks to every stage in life. The elderly hear the call to integrity and wisdom; the middle aged the call to generativity and responsibility and the young to identity and intimacy.

Whatever the truth of the stories they all teach us about a God who is open and welcoming to all. A God ready to help each of us at any and every stage of life which is why we need to ponder the stories about Jesus which have much to teach us whatever our age.

### **Epiphany** Malcolm Guite

It might have been just someone else's story,  
some chosen people get a special king.  
We leave them to their own peculiar glory,  
we don't belong, it doesn't mean a thing.  
But when these three arrive they bring us with them,  
gentiles like us, their wisdom might be ours;  
a steady step that finds an inner rhythm,  
a pilgrim's eye that sees beyond the stars.  
They did not know his name but still they sought him,  
they came from elsewhere but still they found;  
in temples they found those who sold and bought him,  
but in the filthy stable, hallowed ground.

Their courage gives our questing hearts a voice  
to seek, to find, to worship, to rejoice!!

**What would have happened if it had been three Wise Women instead of three Wise Men?**

*They would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought practical gifts.*

**But what they would have said when they left...?**

*“Did you see the sandals Mary was wearing with that gown?”*

*“That baby doesn’t look anything like Joseph!”*

*“Virgin? Yeah! I knew her in school!”*

*“Can you believe that they let all of those disgusting animals in the house?”*

*“I heard that Joseph isn’t even working right now!”*

*“And that donkey that they are riding has seen better days too!”*

*“Want to bet on how long it will take until you get your casserole dish back?”*