

St Brandon's 10.15 am

7 Jan 2024

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6; Psalm 72; Matt 2: 1-2

An Epiphany Collage

Just less than two weeks ago, on Christmas Day, Geoff asked us 'Who travelled furthest to Bethlehem?' And he pointed to the Magi and said – they're not part of this, they haven't arrived yet! The answer to Geoff's question was - ?

Jesus, who left heaven to come to earth as a vulnerable human baby, God's only Son.

He travelled furthest, further than we will ever understand, even further than the magi, but their arrival, foretold by Isaiah and recorded by Matthew, is full of mystery and meaning.

This morning's sermon is something of a collage. I've asked Jenny and Nick to bring you two very different poems as part of the sermon. I will also read you part of a New Year message from our cathedral. After each one we'll pause for a few moments to reflect on what we've heard. Lets be like Mary who *pondered these things and treasured them in her heart*, these things of great mystery and meaning which are given to us through the God's Word in Scripture. Our first poem is Malcolm Guite's sonnet for Epiphany, *The Magi*.

Jenny reads.

PAUSE

'But when these three arrive they bring us with them'

The arrival of the magi demonstrated that Jesus comes both as Messiah to the people of Israel and as Saviour of the whole world. The magnitude of God's salvation plan is expressed through the distance the wise men travel and the races and cultures they represent.

Yesterday I received a message from Michael Everitt, Canon Pastor at our cathedral – others may have done so too. He writes about being struck afresh by the new star which guided the wise men, and his growing understanding of the time and distance travelled by its light. Geoff, if you'd asked 'What travelled furthest?', that star would certainly have won!

Michael writes:

I do understand that even though the speed of light is very fast (almost 300 million metres per second), the distances in space are equally immense and that it takes just over four years for light emitted from the nearest star system to reach us.

The North Star's distance means that it takes around 433 light years for its light to reach us.

*Thus, when we look at the stars, we are looking at history, even the immediate is centuries old, and the formation of **the star** (the one recorded in today's gospel) and the appearance of trajectory and observations on earth takes us into something that is almost back to the commencement of time itself... to that initial moment when 'stars were flung into space'....*

I realised that the immediacy of the Magi and their inspiration by a star was in fact tied up to an eternal timeframe.

„It was all linked to the moment of creation: a sense of plan from the outset. Jesus' birth as the incarnate word of God in Bethlehem at that precise moment was woven into the very creation of the cosmos.

PAUSE

St Paul makes the same point about the immensity of God's plan in today's epistle reading, which is on your blue sheet. Do take it hope to reflect on.

He speaks of:

The plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, and the eternal purpose that God has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

God's salvation plan, bigger than we can ever grasp or imagine, is also for you and me, in bringing *us* to God through faith in Christ. **This is our story, this is our song.**

Hosanna in the highest

As we've read the Christmas story this year, we have seen again and again that God's dealings with people are surprising, deeply personal, and risky. Fiona and David's drama last week about the shepherd and his wife reminded us poignantly that faith is a risky business- if choose to play safe we are likely to miss God. Are we ready to take risks with God, this year?

So I end with a poem from the Iona community, after which we pause before a final prayer.

Nick reads *Epiphany Reading 1* from *Cloth for the Cradle*

PAUSE

Final Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,

present at creation flinging stars into space,

present in our world as a helpless refugee.

We worship and adore you, for you are our Saviour.

We ask you this year, to challenge our presumptions,

challenge our living,

and call us on as we journey on with you.

Amen.