

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : January 6th, 2019  
“Epiphany”

---

**EPIPHANY, 10:00 SUNDAY MORNING**

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, the word which means showing/revealing. The Magi went on a journey to an unknown destination and they put their trust in God to show them the way – and they brought to the child gifts fit for a King.

Yet sometimes we highlight more the gifts the Magi were bringing which means we forget what brought them there in the first place. It was God who had called these learned men from other nations to be there when Jesus was still a baby, so he could welcome them as well. They were present in the stable, representing all the nations. Their arrival meant that things certainly changed for Mary and Joseph. Mary would probably, if reluctantly, have welcomed the Magi in to see the Christ child – realising that he was not hers but was for the whole world. God wanted these outsiders, these foreigners, to be among the first to meet his Son, because Jesus had come into the world for everybody, and not just for the Jewish people.

And what about their long journey? TS Eliot wondered about it in his poem, which begins: 'A cold coming we had of it, just the worst time of the year for a journey, and such a long journey: The ways deep and the weather sharp, The very dead of winter.' Scholars have long argued about how far they actually would have travelled. If, as some think, they came from Persia, a distance of some 800 miles, it would have taken them some months – but in truth we don't know and it probably doesn't matter. The main point is that they travelled on tirelessly and without giving

up in order to worship the Christ-child – but all the time guided on their journey by God.

And that theme of travelling, of pilgrimage, has continued as a strong concept for all Christians from then on. We often speak of our own pilgrim journey as Christians. For many of us, our Christian faith was first kindled when we were brought to Church by our parents and godparents to be baptised. They may have continued to bring us along until we were able to come on our own – or there could well have been a gap until we began to discover, to uncover, faith for ourselves. Many of us are still discovering our faith on our pilgrim journey, a journey that we make alongside others. In Church our worship is not a static thing, as we travel to come together, as we move around to share the peace and finally as we all walk up to the altar to receive Communion, not as strangers but as pilgrims and friends.

Many years ago, when I first led joint worship in an ecumenical church, we used to sing a lively song, called “Moses I know you’re the man”. The second verse goes: “Don’t get too set in your ways, the Lord said, each step is only a phase, the Lord said, I’ll go before you and I shall be a sign to guide my travelling, wandering race, you’re the people of God”.

In truth human beings are not very good at coping with change. But when change happens, we can know with certainty in our hearts that God is with us and that he has a plan for each of us. He has a plan for you and he has a plan for me.

The TS Eliot poem concludes: “A hard time we had of it. At the end we preferred to travel all night, sleeping in snatches, with the voices singing in our ears, saying that this was all folly. But we continued and arrived at evening, not a moment too soon finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory”.

As you and I continue on our pilgrim journeys, we hope and pray that the outcome will be more than “satisfactory”. May God bless and guide us all in this new year. Amen.