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Christ Church West Wimbledon
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SERMON – EPIPHANY 2021

One year on a post-Christmas break, I went to Church in a tiny Derbyshire village Church on the Feast of the Epiphany – only about 10 people plus me. “Oh, we don’t usually have to welcome visitors after Christmas” said the surprised Vicar to me afterwards. I was somewhat taken aback and really did not know how to reply – so I didn’t!

But his comment - “Oh, we don’t usually have to welcome visitors after Christmas” – has always made me ponder - and I recently thought back to an article I once read written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, when he wrote:

“We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family.” We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders.

Today we celebrate the Epiphany. The word means ‘showing’ or ‘revealing’ – and when those wise men arrived with their presents, God was showing or revealing himself to the whole world – not just to his chosen people, but to everyone, to the

outsiders from all nations. Whatever country you come from, whatever your background, whatever you look like, whatever language you speak, God is saying to all of us today – ‘He is there for you and no one is left out. You don’t have to have the right pedigree to be left out. You don’t have to pass any exams to know God’.

What did they bring with them?

They were kings/magi – so it follows they would bring special gifts

- ❖ Gold – for Christ is King
- ❖ Incense – for He is God and the atmosphere of prayer is helped by the incense we burn
- ❖ Myrrh (oil used for embalming the dead) = he was to suffer and to die

Would Mary – or Joseph for that matter – have known the significance of these gifts? Not sure – perhaps Mary might have done – or at least she would have stored these things in her heart.

We sometimes get so interested in the gifts that the wise men were bringing that we forget what brought them there in the first place. It was God who had called these wise 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, so that when God welcomed them, he was welcoming each of us.

Their arrival meant that things certainly changed for Mary and Joseph. Our crib has changed - the mysterious Magi and their gifts have joined the local shepherds –

because Jesus has gone from the cosy to being revealed, being shown to the world. The world is let into the stable – and some would say that the world has never left the stable and still only thinks of Jesus the Baby – not seeing Christ the King, not acknowledging him as God – and certainly never recognising that he was to suffer and die for us.

Mary would probably have, even reluctantly, 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.

We have to do the same – to let people see and experience what we have been privileged to see. As Christians we need to remember that the Good News of the Gospel is for everyone, and not just those like us. What we have to do every day is to be as true and faithful – full of faith – to our calling as we can be – and never forget to get across the message to everyone who will listen - the stable door is open and anyone can come in – all are welcome.

So today at the start of a New Year, we ask God to turn us into people who are always happy to welcome those who might feel themselves to be outsiders, striving to approach every person and every situation we encounter with humility and gentleness of heart, as God through Jesus has approached and welcomed each one of us.