Isaiah 60 1 - 6,   Matthew 2, 1 - 2

Did you watch the King's Christmas broadcast? Did you see that he visited Bethlehem, went to the place which has been venerated for years, as the birthplace of Jesus, marked out in the floor by a large star?

Perhaps you did not notice that it was, in fact, a large cave over which the Emperor Constantine built an elaborate church.

The contrast between a village girl giving birth in an outbuilding and the visits of emperors and kings could not be greater.

They came to see a mystery. We go to see the place where Jesus was revealed to the world.

 This is what **epiphany** means - showing, revealing, manifesting, The meeting of faith and experience.  Hebrews 11,1

It is where the Saviour of the world, the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, was shown to the world - a wonder which amazed the shepherds, a baby worshipped by strangers from the east.

Who were these strangers?  They are sometimes known as kings and given names but the Bible just says **Magi.**

Of Persian origin we might think of them as scientists, curious to explain the workings of the universe. They were interested in philosophy, medicine, the natural sciences, the movement of the stars, the interpretation of dreams to foretell the future.

They wanted to know and find out.

Over the years they sank into disrepute as fortune tellers and magicians. The apostles Peter and John came across one such in Samaria. He saw them healing people through the power of the Holy Spirit and wanted to buy this power for himself. You can read this encounter in Acts 8.  He is known as Simon Magus. Paul encountered the sorcerer Elymas in Paphos when he tried to turn the proconsul Sergius Paulus against their preaching and you can read what Paul did to silence him in Acts 13.

The Magi who came to Bethlehem were genuine seekers after the truth. For some time there had been an expectation of a significant royal birth and, when they saw an unusual star at its rising, they conjectured that a king had been born.

They had been expecting a phenomenon so they set off on their journey to see if their conjecture had been right.

They followed the star to the palace in Jerusalem where they were received by an ill-tempered, suspicious King Herod. He gathered all the Sanhedrin, all 70 members, together to help them in their quest.

He was alarmed when they quoted the prophecy of Micah, given 7 centuries earlier:   "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one Who will rule over Israel."

The Magi set off for Bethlehem, a village about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, a place of great significance for the Jews. Not only was it where their ancestor Jacob had buried Rachel, where Ruth had lived after her marriage to Boaz, but it was the home of David, their greatest king.

Time has passed since Jesus was born. The Magi found the Child in a house. The star seemed to have stopped. They were overjoyed at their journey's end and the proof of their conjecture.

Their packs were full of costly gifts. After all they came from the same part of the world as the Queen of Sheba who brought king

David "large quantities of gold and precious stones" (1 Kings 10).

 In our Reading today from Isaiah it repeats, "And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense."

Matthew says, " They opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. Then they went home rejoicing. avoiding Jerusalem."

We do not know how many Magi came. We do know that they did not come for personal gain but to do homage to a king.

The Son of God was revealed "to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles", to the humble and ignorant first, then to the honourable and learned, to the poor and then the rich.

"Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart."   Luke 2, 12

What treasures can we bring? It is a question only we can answer. Obviously not worldly goods but what Jesus values most, loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves.

We thank You, Lord God , for this Epiphany, of Your  Son, Immanuel, God with us. May we, in this new year, commit ourselves to Your service, to loving our neighbours and being Your hands and feet.