St Peter’s – Epiphany – 10:30

We Three Kings of Orient Are, One in a taxi, one in a car, one a scooter blowing his hooter, wondering where we are…

Flippant, but where are we? The Christmas hubbub has died down, you might have started to think about de-christmas-ing everything.

Epiphany – the day we celebrate the 3 kings adoring the baby Jesus, bringing gifts, after a long journey. We spend so much time leading up to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but what do we think now he has been born?

What were the fruits of your advent journey? What gifts have you discovered? The visit of the three kings, all the way from the Orient, help us to reflect on our journey and the gifts that we can bring.

In September 2016, I was travelling back to Durham and I was shattered. I’d been on placement abroad, arrived back in Manchester, then travelled to Southampton for a few days in the hope of seeing my brother (who I hadn’t seen for a year)). I’d an argument with Poppy on the phone (which promptly died), and my train was 40 minutes delayed and packed with football fans after hauling my suitcase across London in 10 minutes.

To say that I was feeling of an uncharitable disposition is to put it mildly! But thank God for Terry, Tim and Simon on my table with me. Loyal fans from Newcastle, who’d made a weekend of the trip to London. Even though they had lost and they had the train back to Newcastle in defeat – they were seeing the better side. They were laughing, joking, taking the time to find out about each other better.

It really helped that they had 4 bottles of wine, which after 10 minutes, they had told me to put my laptop away and join in drinking with them!

It isn’t quite gold, frankincense and myrrh, (and I’m thankful for it – imagine chewing frankincense!) but Terry, Tim and Simon were generous with what they had. It was this that allowed a brief, if fleeting, friendship to happen. They gave me something that has stuck with me since.

Our reading this morning tells us that the Wise Men visited Jesus a little while after his birth and after the shepherds – makes sense really, they had further to travel!

I wonder what the Magi recognise that was different about Jesus? These were learned men, they knew of the Jewish Scriptures – to be able to paraphrase Isaiah. And they turned up at the palace expecting to see a king.

What did they recognise about about Jesus to have come all of that way, to be confounded and find a village girl, her woodworker betrothed and a baby?

Would they have agreed with St Athanasius’ about who Jesus is? (in ‘On the Incarnation’), that ‘’The saviour of us all, the Word of God, in his great love took to himself a body and moved as man among man, meeting their senses, so to speak, half-way. He became himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works that He, the Word of God, did through in the body’.

It would seem that they recognised something, because instead of being disheartened after their long journey, the wise men are delighted – and see the baby with great joy. It always comes back to us. This is where we come in. You and I, on our own faith journeys within our collective journey as a church together. Their quest of the Wise Men poses a question for us – on our journey, what do we see of Jesus that fills us with great joy?

But what do they do, in their joy?

They offer gifts. Why did they offer the gifts they offered?

Well, the kings were gentiles. They are from Persia. My flippant song at the start is only half in jest. Terry, Tim and Simon weren’t, as far as I know, Christian. But they gave something memorable that were written down and remembered.

Their gifts resonate with the type of high-price gifts spoken of in the Psalms and Song of Songs. The tribute to a king goes way back to the queen of Sheba and David.

Rabanus Maurus of Mainz in the 8th Century wrote that the meaning of the three gifts were frankincense, offered honor to God’s Christ, in gold, affirmed his royal prestige; and in myrh, symbolised the bitter herbs of Jesus’ burial. But Rabanus goes on to write of the gifts that we can offer on our journey, as follows:

‘’Let us offer the gold of wisdom, the frankincense of devoted prayer, the myrh of denying ourselves for the sake of others. Let us offer consecration of the body, purity of speech, honesty of work. Let us offer sympathy, patience and continence. Let us offer kindness, sober judgement and mercy. For these are gifts pleasing to God… [who] needs nothing. [But] regards everything offered by God to us, so that all things might be offered to God by us’’

Our readings this morning tell us how the Magi heard the word of God for them, and what they did after their transformation by meeting the infant Jesus’ in their own lives.

And my prayer this morning is that we all might be remembered for the same – no matter whatever wisdom we may acquire, what gifts we have to give, or the journeys we go on– let us be known for the great joy that we have from seeing the infant Jesus. Amen.