

### **Chalking this up to Experience!**

*Isaiah 60<sup>1-6</sup>; Psalm 72<sup>10-15</sup>; Ephesians 3<sup>1-12</sup>; Matthew 2<sup>1-12</sup>*

*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,  
they left for their country by another road.  
(Matthew 2<sup>12</sup>)*

At the end of this service I am going to revive a fairly ancient tradition - of blessing chalk - and I ask you to take a piece of blessed chalk home with you and, following the instructions on the front inside page of your service booklet, mark either the lintel over the door, or the door step, as a blessing on your home. From experience, this is always a talking point when people call at your door and an opportunity in a very relaxed way to share your faith.

On balance, I think that this is a positive and visible thing to do - anything that makes it easier to talk about what we believe is good; nevertheless, I am aware that by doing this we buy into the myth that there were three wise men and that their names were Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. All that we know is that there were wise men and that they gave three gifts: **gold, frankincense and myrrh**.

Avoiding pointless discussions, I think that the Feast of the Epiphany should teach us three things:

- ✦ There are no short-cuts to finding faith in Jesus. The Magi tried that when they visited Herod - surely a king would know where a king was to be born. That mistake was costly for the infants slaughtered in Bethlehem by Herod as he tried to eradicate a rival. We are called to repent, believe, be baptised and become disciples: that is our star.
- ✦ This is the great feast of the Church that reminds us that even we can belong - Paul, the great Apostle, tells us in Galatians that he is a **prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles**. Gentiles weren't looking for a Messiah but still had need of a Saviour - that is Jesus. In God's playful imagination - long before the early Church had worked out that Gentiles could belong - Gentiles turn up with three gifts for Jesus and so God shows us that Gentiles have had a place in his heart and plan.

- ✦ Once we have encountered Jesus in worship (the word used for **homage** is from the Greek, *proskuneo* - to approach with a kiss, to worship) we, like the Magi, travel a different road. When we meet Jesus we can never be the same. Daily, we become like him as God's spirit works in us

The Feast of the Epiphany is one that is tied up with two particular memories for me:

- ✦ The first is that this was the occasion of my final Sunday in our previous Parish. I reviewed the sermon I preached then and noted that its principle point was **The Church doesn't exist to make people happy, the Church exists to make God known**. I still hold to that view - and your little piece of chalk may help a little in doing that.
- ✦ The second is of thanksgiving for the Church of the Epiphany - it served its community well, but it too had to take another road. It was the imagination of the people that established it that now makes possible the imagination of this generation to make God known.

The myth that grows out of the truth is harmless and of no consequence. It is the faith that grows out of truth that matters!