

## 2020 Vision!

Isaiah 60<sup>1-6</sup>; Psalm 72<sup>10-15</sup>; Ephesians 3<sup>1-12</sup>; Matthew 21<sup>1-12</sup>

*Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. [Matthew 21<sup>11</sup>]*

On Epiphany Sunday last year we looked forward to the reordering of the Church - and a period of being as nomadic as the Magi (with having to use the Church Hall for services). With just a few weeks, the work is done and now we need to look to God for 2020 vision as we move forward.

I have been reflecting on the role of Magi and believe that there is a great deal we can learn from them as we look to establishing more firmly our witness to the Gospel and our role as a Parish Church.

✠ **The Magi** teach us that the Church doesn't need to focus so much on what it does well but the things we need to work harder at - instead of a ministry of welcome, where people come to Church on our terms, but a ministry of inclusion, where people add to a Christian community on their own terms.

The Magi come to Israel as strangers and are outsiders, yet they are essential to the Nativity Story - could you imagine a crib scene without them?

The nave of the Church is named after the Latin, *nave*, meaning a ship (because the magnificent roof looks like an up-side-down hull). I suppose we should make clear that this *nave* isn't a cruise ship, but a lifeboat: there are no passengers and everyone has a role.

If you are new(er) here you must forgive us for what my Churchwarden disparagingly calls 'blockers': the truth is that those who do the work find themselves tired and under pressure because it is always the same people doing everything, yet the impression is that everything is covered.

In fact, we have need of people to step forward to use the talents God has given them for the sake of his kingdom. Do you feel called to read a lesson, to pray, to serve coffee after a service, to clean the Church, to be a sidesperson - learn from the Magi and set off on that journey: remember that they didn't get an invitation to Jesus' birth, they followed the star and knocked on the door!

✠ **Gold**, the gift from the Magi, reminds us of the need for honest giving to sustain work of God here. We have been spared the need for endless fundraising to refurbish the Church by the generosity of those in the past. Having done that we have lost the buffer that has kept the Church going. In reality we need around £1,250 per week to keep the doors open and our giving is around £900 per week.

Our giving needs to be reviewed so that we don't have to keep going on about it. We receive no funding from the government or the Church of England, so the buck stops with us. To support the work of God isn't a burden but a spiritual privilege!

✠ **Frankincense** the second gift from the Magi, has always been a symbol of purification and prayer ascending to God. Our principal responsibility is to offer worship to God that is the best it can be. It isn't about taste or preference - how we would all like to have our favourite hymns and readings every week and a sermon that makes us feel good about ourselves.

Worship is to know that God is God and that we approach him in awe and love to offer him the best that we have and the best that we are.

✠ **Myrrh**, the final gift, was a reminder of death as it was used in embalming: it is the gift that speaks of the unique ministry that lay ahead of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sin.

The ministry of comfort and healing lies at the heart of our mission. It isn't that we can wave a magic wand and take pain away, but we can help people relax into the arms of God where they will be safe and loved.

The greatest frustration as a priest and pastor is when people lie. I am sure that you find it too! 'How are you?' How many of us tell the truth? The beginning of supporting each other is to be a community of truth - when we need help, we do need to say so.

Wise Men - and women - learn from these visitors! It is to learn to include, to give, to worship and to support and to do so in the name of the Christ that the Magi came to worship.

When we are consistently that sort of community then we will grow into the people God calls us to be.