

Matthew 2:1-12

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

It is "Twelfth Night." Superstitions have it that we make sure the Christmas decorations are down by tonight. Ours are still up. There does come a point when the decorations are down but it not about superstitions it is about being practical. When do you stop saying "Happy New Year"? I was listening to the cricket commentary and one of the commentators said he stopped at the end of the first Sunday of the year, for that is when the majority will be going back to work.

They were going to see a child and when they saw him "they knelt down and paid him homage."

To pause in the presence of a new-born child is something special. Some of the most memorable moments for me, during my years of ministry, have been spending time with a family just after the birth of a child. I am not one who goes weak at the knees when I see a new baby, I am not one wanting to hold one in my arms. Yet there is something special in the new born. There have been a few occasions when I have been the first apart from Mum and Dad to see the little one; those occasions are so precious to have shared in that new elation is amazing.

We cannot know what would have been the thoughts of those we read about in this passage, the visitors or the visited. We have no idea how the conversation went following a knock on a door by total strangers.

These visitors came for a royal birth and found a humble birth. They came expecting a palace and found a small house. They came expecting attendants galore and they found just a mother and child.

When we go to God what do we expect to find? We might be surprised.

When we approach God what do we feel we need to take with us? Fine words and rich gifts?

No, all we need to take is ourselves. Back in 1978 John Pantry released a song called "Empty Handed" from which the following lyrics are taken.

"Empty handed, that is how he wanted me; he commanded I left my own plans at his feet; til I had nothing, nothing of my own, and then he filled my life to overflowing."

When we come before this child, this king, we need not bring a gift other than self and when we do so we receive the biggest gift on offer, grace upon grace, abundant life and a glorious purpose travelling in a new direction.