

## Friday 25<sup>th</sup> December – Christmas Day.

### Reading Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, '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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“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.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then 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.' When 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This reading is really for 6<sup>th</sup> January, Epiphany, the day we have traditionally taken down our Christmas decorations by and the date of Christmas in the Orthodox Church. It is the day we mark the arrival of the Magi, Wise men, Kings, or whatever term we use for these visitors.

Today, 25<sup>th</sup> December, our Christmas Day, is the day of present given in our culture whether people have faith in Jesus or not.

Over the years I have celebrated Christmas in different ways depending upon where I have been living and how close to wider family we have been.

This year there would have been no midnight service for me to lead and just one morning service in Church followed by a quiet afternoon at home with my wife due to the Covid restrictions.

The Christmas morning worship service is one I really enjoy, it is normally a service full of energy and interaction but this year, 2020, it cannot be so. There will have been no rushing around the congregation finding out what gifts have been received and opened before Church. It may be more of checking out the facemasks at a distance.

Over the years I have developed a pattern of giving a gift to each person who attends Christmas morning with me. The gifts have been varied depending upon the theme of the service. Last year it was candy canes, a sweet inspired by the Nativity story.

This year the gift was a drinking straw, a paper drinking straw. Why? Well the baby was laid in a manger and in the images on the Christmas cards there is straw upon which the baby is sleeping,, hence the straw. It was a paper drinking straw to remind us of the need to avoid one use plastic whenever we can as we seek to take care of this planet, which God has gifted to us for our stewardship.

The gifts of the visitors that first Christmas spoke something of the life of Jesus; there was gold for a King, Incense for a deity and myrrh as a symbol of death.

What presents have you unwrapped this year? What do they say about you and the person who gave them?

Christmas is truly about the gift of Jesus as a Saviour to the world. The gift of Jesus tells us that the Giver is Love and we are in need of forgiveness and salvation not by works but by accepting the gift on offer.

Unless the gift under the tree is taken, unwrapped and used it is of no value. Accept the gift of God, Jesus, get unwrapping the truth about him in the coming year and discover the joy of salvation, purpose and love in life.