

Sermon for Sunday 9th January 2022 (Epiphany) 'Can we still adore?'

Isaiah 60.1-6; Psalm 72.[1-9] 10-15; Ephesians 3.1-12; [Matthew 2.1-12](#)

I love a traditional school nativity play. Shepherds wearing tea towels carrying cuddly sheep, wise men with cardboard crowns and bearing home-made presents, the Virgin Mary and Joseph looking bemused and of course, a heavily wrapped plastic doll named Jesus. Much of the lasting appeal of these plays is that, among the adults in the audience, are always a few former shepherds, the odd former wise man and maybe one or two former virgins who remember these early years. I am a former wise man. Balthazar in fact. As a seven year old I was tasked to sing my verse of 'We three kings', present my gift of myrrh (a perfume bottle) and then gaze adoringly at the plastic doll in the crib before making my regal exit.

In the company of others

In this cameo appearance are three essentials of the Christian life.

The first, is that I [played my part in the company of others](#). The journey that the wise men undertook - based on a fragile vision – was like any journey of faith. It involves making mistakes, occasionally getting lost and needing directions, but - *somehow* – finding the way through. It involved them keeping on going even when their quest seemed insane and when they must have been tempted to give up. But when it was dark, when they were lost, when

whatever it was that they had once glimpsed could no longer be seen, what gave the wise men the tenacity and the will to carry on? Part of the answer must be that it was *each other*. If they had travelled alone, then I'm sure they would never have made it.

We are meant to journey *together*, to share with one another our joys and our disappointments. We are not meant to be travelling alone. This is why the current pandemic still hits so hard emotionally. Nevertheless, I believe that in 2022 we are witnessing an opportunity - to surge in creativity as the whole church takes responsibility for its common life, each one of us playing our part, but none of us doing so alone. *We need each other*. Particularly when the going gets tough!

Have we given without holding back?

The second thing to glean from my role as Balthazar is that, at the time in question, at that stage of history, I gave to God all that I had. The wise men gave gifts to Jesus. Somewhere along the line they would have received these gifts, and now they are giving them to God.

One of the saints of the last century was Mother Teresa. In the years following her final profession, she wanted to find new and hidden ways of expressing her love for God. In April 1942 she vowed 'to give to God anything that He may

ask, not to refuse Him anything.’ She said: ‘I wanted to give God something very beautiful’ and ‘without reserve.’ That was the source of Mother Teresa’s saintliness; this willingness to not refuse God anything; this relinquishment, this abandonment of herself to God’s will, that made her effective and fruitful in the service of her God. Years later, when she referred to this vow she said ‘This is what hides everything in me’ adding: ‘Why must we give ourselves fully to God? Because God has given himself to us. If God who owes nothing to us is ready to impart to us no less than Himself, shall we answer with just a fraction of ourselves? [To give ourselves fully to God is a means of receiving God himself.](#) I for God and God for me.’

Whether it is New Year Resolutions or renewing our Covenant with God as the Methodist Church does, The Feast of the Epiphany is a great opportunity for us to worship Christ and to present him with the gift of ourselves - all that we are and everything we have. Freely and wholeheartedly yielding all things to God’s pleasure and disposal.

What do you adore?

The third thing to glean from my brief moment as Balthazar is that I gave myself to adoration. I became, in the words of that familiar hymn, ‘lost in wonder, love and praise’ (or at least that was the idea, although it was hard to convey when the object of your adoration was a plastic doll called Bob!)

The wise men were open to spiritual things. They had received a vision. And, whatever it was, it caused them to drop everything and travel miles through hostile territory, risking their lives, enduring hardship and discomfort. The key to this odyssey of faith is that *they trusted in their spiritual intuition* and were willing (and humble enough) to live with a sense of mystery. That precious encounter between genuine mystery and our sense of wonder has been so suppressed by our modern culture. However, there is a persistent hunger in people for a sense of mystery, for something more than our usual diet of things tangible, proven and understood.

In each one of us (albeit sometimes well-hidden) there is courage and compassion, love and longing, and a desire for something special. We should nurture these longings and follow the light we see - whether it is through prayer that trusts and enjoys the silence, joy when a child is born, or when a sense of something beyond ourselves is glimpsed through art or music, or even through suffering as it humbles and opens our hearts.

Epiphany is a time for something to awaken in us a sense of adventure, a belief that risk is worthwhile and a longing to experience something more is the *essence* of our faith and life.

It's about forgetting ourselves and being led. As Evelyn Underhill puts it - away from the world of 'here and now desires and needs' into a deeper, fuller

experience of God. 'Worship', she said, 'is an avenue which leads the creature out from his inveterate self-occupation to a knowledge of God, and ultimately to that union with God which is the beatitude of the soul.'

That is what it means to be truly lost in wonder, love and praise!

In summary

So as a former 'wise man' I would say that today is about playing your part in the company of others, it is about giving your gifts - especially the gift of yourself - to God, and it is fundamentally about adoration - being lost or abandoned to wonder, love and praise; and when the going gets tough, never giving up. There is always a way forward, if you have the patience to look in the right place and the humility to trust the timeless and abundant signs of God.

Happy Epiphany - and may God bless you on your continuing journey...

Amen!

Fr. Mike 9th January (Epiphany) 2022