



Sunday, 6 January 2019 – Epiphany
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6 Gospel St Matthew 2:1-12
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

I said in my welcome to this service that inspiration for services and sermons comes from many sources. Why I thought of Mae West last week I cannot say, as I do not recall ever seeing her in action but she did have a reputation for one-liners. What came to mind was a misquote of hers "It's not the church in my life, but the life in my church that interests me! And, as we have been thinking about our Mission Action Plan for 2019, this seems apposite but let's see where my other thoughts led me.

Over Christmas I've enjoyed watching a range of films on TV. The best was an adaptation of the favourite book of my teenage years, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. I love the social mix of Elizabeth Bennett of modest means, juxtaposed with the ultra-wealthy Mr Darcy. Both believe that they have the right principles to live life with integrity and that the other is wrong. Only when events throw them together needing both to have an open mind do they see that there's integrity when values work together, for the benefit of others. The film depicted a different era to our own but, as we know, pride and prejudice still divide people today and the Christmas story reminds us that it was exactly the same 2,000 years ago.

Back-tracking for a brief moment, at Midnight Mass, we reflected on the humble shepherds. Inspired by the message of the angels they left their sheep – their livelihood - unattended on the hillside to go and witness the evidence for themselves. Their occupation of tending dusty livestock counted against them socially but also, spiritually, as they had no leisure to fulfil the Jewish ritual cleansing to take part in formal worship. No wonder when they came to the manger-throne and found a loving welcome, did they then feel inspired to rush out to share the good news.

Today we recall the Wise Men seeking Jesus. They were not aimless travellers but men of great learning with a thirst for knowledge, which motivated them to travel to find answers to their questions. Their costly gifts indicate that they were also men of great wealth that opened doors, as they were of sufficient importance for King Herod to receive them at Court.

Even though, in conversation, it soon became clear to the visitors that the quest of following the star did not lead to a royal baby born in a palace, they did not turn back. Nor did they turn back even when their epic journey led them to a dirty stable in a non-descript town heaving with Jewish nationals gathered for the registration. On the contrary, when the star rested over the stable, they were overjoyed and knelt before the manger; opened their treasure chests; offered their gifts and worshipped the baby. No pride and prejudice: only homage and humility.

Fast-forwarding thirty years, Jesus in his ministry would say how hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. Wealthy people have everything at their disposal such that God can fade from peoples' minds when wealth can buy everything anybody could want in this life. Wanting, however, is not the same as needing. All need a Saviour to guide them to eternity and that's someone money can't buy. But we don't all have to be as wealthy as Mr Darcy to have wrong perceptions, Elizabeth Bennett with modest means had her prejudices too. Only when love brought the couple together did they perceive that holding to their principles did not necessarily make them right. What a mercy then that God does not require us to be right all of the time but prefers that we keep open hearts and minds. By humbling himself, in the form of a baby God came to fill all aching voids with the wealth of his love.

It takes humility to recognise a power beyond our own and this the three wealthy foreigners grasped. They knelt before the vulnerable baby in a manger because they were not only wealthy but also, wise. They laid aside all preconceptions and drawn by the light of his star, with open hearts and minds they gazed in wonder at the Christ-child. For, as Isaiah had prophesied, they recognised that this baby came for the salvation of people of every nation equally and so, they offered their gifts in gratitude.

I wonder if like the Wise Men you also journeyed in faith this Christmas? Perhaps you used the '*Follow the Star*'* booklets or did you prefer to reflect on discipleship in your own way? Both methods of generating faithful reflections are valued by God. Together, our reflections can be even more powerful as a means of drawing others to Christ as well, as supporting each other if we consolidate them into our Mission Action Plan. Similar to the Wise Men, the task may at times seem daunting and challenge our perceptions. Faithful discipleship is open to fresh perspectives in the knowledge that it's Gods mission and he will guide us if, in faith, we prayerfully ask for his help.

Trusting to the light of a star, the Wise Men set out on their journey to an unknown destination but in the light of faith, it gathered them to the manger-throne. In whatever way God directs our Mission Action Plan, like the Wise Men, each journey starts with a single step. Together, for the lively future of this church, are we willing to step forward faithfully this year?

Amen

#Follow The Star – A journey through the 12 Days of Christmas, Church House Publishing 2018