



**Sunday, 5 January 2020 – The Feast of the Epiphany**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6, Gospel of St Matthew 2:1-12**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

### **Viewing life objectively**

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, which means revelation or realisation. It's the time when the 'Wise Men' or 'Three Kings' as the famous carol calls them present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. The gifts representing the fullness of Christ's diversity, his kingship, divinity and humanity. In the Gospel of Matthew, we heard not only of the baby king Jesus and the three givers of gifts but also of the king whose presence is subsumed by the others - King Herod. Just for a few brief moments I'd like you to imagine that you are King Herod by way of an alternative Epiphany sermon. To truly understand a situation or ourselves, sometimes it's helpful to view life through the eyes of another especially one who is on the periphery of the central action.

### **Grand Designs**

Well King Herod, on the face of it you've got everything going for you:

- **Power:** you've been appointed by the Romans;
- **Position:** you're King of the Jews;
- **Plenty:** Money is no object.

If you've ever seen the TV programme *Grand Designs* those builds are midgets compared to the monumental structures you've created the length and breadth of your Kingdom. You want for nothing or, do you?

### **Entertaining strangers**

The down side to having it all and everyone at your beck and call is that you're bored rigid! Happily, some strangers mounted on camels have wandered into your palace courtyard. That they can travel comfortably means they're rich and seem to be well-educated fellows, so they'll be worth entertaining, it'll pass the time and maybe help you to form some useful alliances. So, they enter your presence and make the necessary polite pleasantries: you settle back on your throne waiting to enjoy the conversation. But, strangely and worryingly, it seems that these chaps are not remotely interested in you! They get straight to the point of their visit and ask a question: "Where is the child who is born to be King of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." "What!" You say to yourself. "King of the Jews? I'm the King of the Jews! Who's this child that they're talking about?"

## **Epiphany moment!**

You can't brush this aside as being ridiculous, these visitors are wise guys. The metaphorical wall of security that you have built around yourself has just come crashing down. For you know, they know and your subjects know that you were not born a Jew! You need to consult your advisors fast! You don't wait long for an answer for they tell you outright that in Jewish scripture it states that the King of the Jews would be born not in in a man-made palace but in Bethlehem, the City of the great King David! To be an anointed king of the line of David means that he will be the Messiah, the one to lead and save his people. Your Epiphany moment is realising that you're not the real deal. You're just a puppet king!

## **Controlled chaos**

Mustering some composure, you give the visitors the requested directions and, as a throw away remark say "By the way, on your return do drop by the palace and let me know where the baby is so that I too may go and worship him." In that moment you grasp that you have become a parody of yourself, outwardly in charge of the situation but inwardly out of control. The Kings depart for Bethlehem and see nothing incongruous in finding the vulnerable baby king in squalid accommodation. Their hope, founded on belief, has turned to joy. You, however, are in a paranoid rage. The visitors have not returned: you're now afraid: you're very afraid. So, you take it out on innocent others wrecking your epiphany moment, your chance of salvation. What worth your power, position and plenty now?

## **The light dawns**

This passage tells us everything we need to know about true kingship and true leadership. It does not lie in acquisition of power, position or plenty but rather in shedding light and life into a world made dark by earthly values. Isaiah understood this kind of king: "Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."

## **Seeing ourselves as we really are**

Now, back to the present; let's reflect on our true selves. None of us is a king but we do like to identify with a certain image, building our own walls of security. We all have our own vanities by which we set so much store. Perhaps we hope that others will be impressed by what we believe we have achieved, whether through education, attaining a certain position or having a decent nest egg in the bank. We expend energy creating layers of comforting veneer that fill our vision but that can cloud our judgement for, underneath the veneer there is only worldly darkness. Jesus came to free us from gazing into worldly darkness to turn us to his glorious light. All God desires, is that we become fully the people he created and let the light and life of his Son speak for itself, through us.

When Epiphany moments occur, it's what we do with them that matters. The wise know that the key to revelation lies in being honest with ourselves and, above all, being honest in our relationship with God.

Amen