

## **Sermon for Sunday 4 January 2026 – The Epiphany – Revd Elke Cattermole**

***Isaiah 60.1-6; Psalm 72.10-15; Ephesians 3.1-12; Matthew 2.1-12***

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I wonder if you like travelling. I know some of you have travelled to family or friends for Christmas or New Year. Some far away some close to home. I wonder if any of you like the excitement to get in the car and just drive. Or even have a destination in mind. Or a slight idea? My son decided to take his young daughter, our granddaughter on a journey to find some snow for the New Year. He decided to travel northwards towards Scotland. He arrived in Scotland, staying in Glencoe, saw ice splattering of snow, staying in Fort William, saw Ben Nevis a little more snow. As a great fan of Harry Potter he wanted to get to this via duct in the North-West of Scotland. They managed to see the things they wanted to and returned home via a different route via Edinburgh returning to London. My concern was he was going to get stuck in a snowstorm, have been in a bad one in Scotland it can be awful. But their journey turned out to be positive and with surprises.

Today, this Sunday, we are celebrating Epiphany. The Epiphany of our Lord is traditionally celebrated on January 6, but today, this year, we are marking Epiphany on the Second Sunday of Christmas. And when you think about it, Epiphany is a wonderful way to begin a New Year, because this story is about people setting out on a journey to see Jesus. That makes it a powerful metaphor for all people of faith. We are all on a journey. In fact, we are on this journey together, to seek Jesus, to understand who he is, and to worship him. Life is a journey, and our life as Christians is very much a journey of faith.

Scripture is filled with journey stories. Abraham is told to leave his home and go to a land God will show him. The Israelites travel through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. Mary and Joseph journey to Bethlehem before the birth of their son. And Jesus himself returns to heaven to prepare a place for us, promising that we will not get lost on our journey, because he is the way, the truth, and the life.

Life really is a journey, and like the Magi before us, we are travelling together to find and worship the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. So, what can we learn from the Magi that will help us on our own journey of faith? In Matthew's Gospel, it tells of how unexpected people are drawn to Jesus on their different journeys.

Beginning the Journey. Matthew tells us that the Magi came to Jerusalem, looking for the child who had been born king of the Jews. They began their journey by going to the wrong place.

However it was a logical place. Jerusalem was the centre of power. Where else would a king be born? The Magi are foreigners. Gentiles. They are not part of Israel's religious establishment. And yet they are the ones who recognize the sign and set out on a costly, risky journey. Jerusalem was the wrong place. When the Magi encounter King Herod, we see the contrast. Herod hears of the Newborn King and is frightened. Power rooted in fear always resists God's light. Even at his birth, Jesus shows us that he is a different kind of king. He does not arrive where we expect him to be. And that means our journey of faith will include surprises. We should expect them.

The Magi also teach us something important: the star alone was not enough. They needed more than a sign in the sky to find Jesus. They needed God's Word, and they needed people who knew God's Word to guide them. The Scriptures pointed them to Bethlehem. And so it is for us. If we want to find Christ, we need God's Word, and we need one another. God may use many things to get us started on our journey – joyful moments, painful experiences, questions, even loss. God meets us where we are, just as he met the Magi through a star, because they were scholars of the heavens and stars.

But once our journey has begun, we need more. Stars, signs, and experiences may start us off – but they will not carry us all the way. For that, we need Scripture, community, and faith. This year there will be 500 year celebrations of William Tyndale who translated the bible, New Testament into English from the Greek. Eventually this enabled the congregation to read the scriptures themselves without the reliance of the priest or other learned leaders in the church. We are all able to do this.

Worship without Agenda. When the Magi finally arrive in Bethlehem, they find Jesus with his mother Mary. And Matthew tells us that they kneel down and pay him homage. They have come for one reason and one reason only: to worship. They come with no agenda. They are not looking for answers to life's deepest questions. They are not trying to gain power or influence. They simply come to honour the king – and to offer him gifts.

What a beautiful picture of worship. We are invited to come before God not to bargain, not to demand, but simply to worship Jesus – and to offer him what we have. The gifts the Magi bring are rich with meaning. Gold, fit for a king, proclaims Jesus as king. Frankincense, used in temple worship, points to Jesus as priest – who opens the way to God and the gates of heaven. Myrrh, used for burial, foreshadows his suffering and death for the sins of the world. In these gifts, Jesus is revealed as king, priest, and saviour—the one who conquers sin and death and opens the way to eternal life.

This is Epiphany: God revealing his salvation not just to Israel, but to the nations, just as Isaiah proclaimed, 'Nations shall come to your light.' Paul, writing in Ephesians, names what Epiphany truly proclaims; 'The Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus.'

Going Home by Another Way. After worshipping Jesus, the Magi return home by another route. Warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they leave changed people, and they travel differently because of it. That detail is more than practical. It is deeply symbolic. The Magi are forever changed by their encounter with Christ. They cannot go back the same way because they are no longer the same people.

What about us? When we first encounter Christ, in our baptism, in faith, in worship and our lives are changed forever. We receive a new identity. We become children of God, citizens of another kingdom, heaven itself. Our journey is redirected. And each time we come to this place, we are changed again. Our sins are forgiven. We are nourished by Word and Sacrament. Our priorities are reshaped. Like the Magi, something of our old self dies, and new life in Christ takes its place. We die to ourselves and are raised with Christ. Our journey takes us by another way.

A New Year, A Faithful Guide. It is a new year, and what a blessing it is to begin this journey together. None of us knows what this year will hold, for ourselves, for our community, or for our world. But we do know this: wherever this year takes us, Jesus goes with us. We have found him. We have worshipped him. And that now we continue our journey, by new and sometimes unexpected roads, but always with 'Emmanuel, God with us, walking beside us.'

Wish you all 'A Happy New Year'!

May the God who revealed his Son to the nations bless us and keep us.

May the Lord make his face shine upon us with grace and mercy.

May the Lord look upon us with favour and give us peace.

Amen.