

# Epiphany - Te Whakaaturanga - 7 January 2024

## Message – Who is sovereign of your heart?

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Creator, Redemer, and Giver of Life, lighten our paths and guide us in your ways. **Amen.**

The story of the Magi is the story of three types of sovereigns. The Magi's quest was to find the sovereign worthy of worship. Though they did not fully understand it, they sought, the sovereign of all creation, our God in human form, the light of the world, our saviour.

Christ's is the ultimate form of sovereignty. The almighty sovereign creator of all things, willing to die for us and all creation to bring a new vision of life and light to all people, setting creation free. This is the sovereign worth seeking, worthy of our worship, gifts, and service, available to all people and all creation. This is our God.

The second type of sovereign is the magi themselves. Elsewhere in the New Testament, 'magi' means magician. Here it perhaps refers to a Persian, Zoroastrian, priestly cast, who expected a saviour to be born in Judea. Matthew gives limited detail. All we really know is they were astrologers from the direction of Persia.

I can hear grinding of teeth in the church of my childhood at *astrologers* being shown in a positive light. Elsewhere the Bible gives guidance about where we can appropriately look for knowledge of God. God speaks to us in many different

ways. We may see signs in the things around us, which we test to see if they are of God.

Whoever the Magi were, they spotted the star because they were zealously observing the heavens. They believed that correctly interpreted, the heavens revealed the truth about specific event on earth and, in this case, they did.

The Magi were seekers of the truth and here in Matthew's gospel they represent gentiles seeking the truth with complete dedication. Looking to pay homage to the new sovereign tells us that, though powerful, the Magi saw themselves as part of somethings greater.

The Magi travelled far, following a heavenly light, led to, and expected to find the new sovereign in the obvious place of power where there is a temple and palaces. From there, the Magi are both directed and led to the place where the new sovereign is really to be found. In this humble home in the least of towns, the hometown of the shepherd who became King David.

And there, somewhat incongruously, they gave gifts fit for a king and worship a child who shows no external signs of the way in which his life would transform the world and reveal the light for all of us to follow. As the gospel unfolds it becomes apparent that there is a light for all of us to follow in the life, death, and new life, of Christ.

King Herod is the third type of sovereign. The visit of the Magi to Jerusalem led to terrible events. Why don't know

why they were led there first. Perhaps, it is a foretaste of response of the power that existed in Jerusalem.

Herod's fear that there is someone more worthy of sovereignty than he leads to him savagely attempting to eliminate the perceived threat to his sovereignty.

The incarnation of the Eternal Word is going to change the world but it is not the type of earthly sovereignty that the Magi, priests, scribes, and Herod are imagining. It is sovereignty of a different realm, one extending beyond borders and even beyond the bounds of time.

Though, Herod didn't understand it, the real challenge to him was that he should change the values that he lived by and the way in which he exercised sovereignty over others.

It is easy to acknowledge our similarity to the Magi. We are seekers of the truth; we bring our gifts to God; we worship God, day by day, week by week, year by year. Like them, we were not born into the house of Israel but, from outside, we have seen the light and chosen to follow that light.

We are far less keen to recognise the ways in which we are like Herod. We hold onto control and power in our lives as he did. We do not always use our power for good. In a consumerist society, how well do our consumer choices reflect our care for all people and all creation? Our choices impact others in ways that are often complex. We cannot ignore the impact of our choices on others, no matter where they live on the earth. We are all interconnected.

Our journey with God is about bringing every part of our lives into the light to be transformed by God's love. We all have parts of our lives that we are not prepared to give to God. The Church would look very different if it was filled with people who brought everything into the light.

As a diocese we are reflecting on how we might create structures that bring life back to the church. However, I am not convinced that is where the issue lies. While Anglican structures are convoluted, they are no worse than any other church. What we lack is enough people driven with a desire to see the church shine as a light into the world.

We appear to be like Herod, afraid of radical transformation of our lives and the world. The Magi were not seeking someone who would only change one tiny corner of the world but a saviour for all the world. The Magi travelled a long way, for a long time, to give their gifts, and worship to the new sovereign. Perhaps the greatest thing they give was a large portion of their time.

We don't know what happened to the Magi but they are a part of our story. They were not Christians, nor was Jesus for that matter, but God worked in and through them. Who around us might God be working in and through? Are we ready to allow God to work in and through us and to join with others who are travelling in the same direction? Without the need to agree on everything.

At the heart of this simple story is sovereignty. Who or what have we made sovereign of our lives? Are we willing, as the

Magi were, to acknowledge our own power and use that power to serve the ultimate sovereign, the God who is love, who came to earth as servant sovereign, as one of us, to live, die, and live again? Or, are we concerned with keeping our power and control for ourselves?

We are all a mixture of both types of sovereigns; hopefully, trying to become more like the Magi, and in the light we have, trying to become more like Christ, the ultimate sovereign.

And how do we become more like Christ? In different seasons this will take different forms. In reading elaborations on the story of the Magi, I particularly liked a tale that suggested that the Magi had different needs, one looking for a King to serve, one looking for God to worship, and one seeking forgiveness and looking for a saviour. We need all three.

None of us will be transformed instantly into the perfect servant of the servant sovereign. We are a work in progress. As we examine our lives, we slowly name those things that need to change. And, as we try to change, we are constantly held in God's loving arms and with the Christ light to guide us, slowly revealing a bit more of that light in our lives.

May God gently direct us towards the light, and by the Holy Spirit guide us and transform us that we may shine more brightly with the light of Christ and love of God. Amen, Amen.



