

We are a little early, Epiphany is the 6th of January, but these dates are all a bit of a guess anyway. Matthew, steeped as he is in the Old Testament, is at pains to link this wonderful event to the prophecies of the Old Testament. He writes for a primarily Jewish readership, and the links give credibility to the story that he recounts some decades after the event. Matthew takes us back to Isaiah and it is from here that we hear of Kings coming to worship the Glory of the Lord. They arrive bringing gifts of gold and frankincense. Many school nativity plays feature kings with their gold paper crowns carrying Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Matthew gives us not Kings, but Wise Men, astrologers, who follow a star seeking the one born to be the King of the Jews. The addition of Myrrh is an obvious link to the death and Resurrection of Jesus, as this would have been used to embalm bodies. All these are precious and expensive gifts suitable for a kingly figure. Small wonder then that they seek for the one born to be King in a palace. They meet with the odious figure of Herod, whose paranoia is further fed with the prospect of another king. In this passage we are spared the grisly details of the slaughter of the Innocents. We might ask ourselves what the Wise Men thought, having prepared themselves to see a King in a palace to find this baby in humble circumstances. All we are told is that they present their gifts and leave by the back door.

Where might we place ourselves in the picture? What do we do as we face the image of this newborn child at Christmas year by year? Do we engage, bring gifts or simply say 'lovely' and dash home to a huge lunch. Then remove the decorations saying, 'that is it, all over for another year'. Has Christmas become an annual event where we spread joy and goodwill, feast and have fun, all good things but could there be more? Are we missing something? Epiphany means showing, the showing of the Christ child to the world. We often talk of an epiphany moment, a time when we suddenly realise something that we have not appreciated before. Could it be that we, too, will have a true Epiphany experience this year, that we, too, may see the light that shines in the darkness.

*'Rich man, rich man, who are you? do you seek the Christ child too?
In your palace and your court, life is busy, life is short,
Have you time to go away, to find a baby in the hay?
Can you get your camel through the needle's eye as you must do.
Rich man, Rich man, you've come far, where did you learn to trust a star
Instead of turning to a king to guide you in your wandering?
Rich man, how did you grow wise in spite of your kingly guise?
Who taught you to play your part, to bring an educated heart
To the stable in the west so you could kneel there and be blessed?'*

Elizabeth Rooney