

## **An Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews for Epiphany**

We come together today having crossed the threshold of another new year, with hopes, dreams and maybe expectations for what the coming year will hold for us both individually and as a family in and with Christ. We have come together as we do every Sunday whether here in person or online, to re-centre our lives, our thoughts, our words and our actions to be in tune with Christ and in order to do that we may, like the wise men, end up going home by a another way because of what we have heard or experienced in this God-filled space.

How many of you enjoy watching a really good box set? I know I do as it is a way for me to enter into someone else's world and have a release from everything that is going on in mine. I love really long box sets, the more series there are in the box set the better; I know I now skip past anything that is less than 2 series long. It's the same as reading novels. I love reading sets of novels. I guess it's because I love to see how the characters develop but one almost becomes a part of the story wondering what is going to happen to the villain or wondering what is going to happen in the next episode. One set of novels that I enjoyed reading is the story about the London lawyer, Matthew Shardlake by C. J. Sansom based in Tudor times and it gives a really good insight to the state of the church then - and we think we have it bad!! There are 7 books in the series and having read them all a few years ago I am now revisiting them and listening to them on audible as I walk to and from work. I don't know about you, but I always feel bereft at the end of a series or a novel. I suppose it's because I have invested a lot of my time getting to know the characters, whether falling in love or loathing of particular characters and if there are some cliff hangers along the way all the better. These characters have become a part of my life if only briefly.

I want to suggest this morning that perhaps we approach the gospels, the whole Bible in fact, as if it is a series of the most amazing stories in which we ourselves are characters in the story. There's going to be love and hate, frustration and anger, a lot of violence, good characters and bad characters, and the stories are going to be full of adventure and discovery, and some fear and danger. And I for one won't mind investing a lot of my time re-visiting the stories - I pray that I will pick up new insights, have a renewed compassion and deeper understanding, and what better place to start this amazing journey for that is what this is, than with the birth of a tiny baby, God incarnate. Let us follow him this year and really live the story and continue to live the story in our lives from day to day. For we, unlike the novel or the box set are

absolutely a part of this continuing story, it doesn't end with the resurrection, it is an ongoing adventure. But I get ahead of myself! Let's start at the very beginning.

Today we celebrate Epiphany. But what if every part of the bible should be an Epiphany - a revelation of who God is and who God is in Christ which shows us how we can live our lives with the light of Christ at the centre, guiding us every step of the way. In the episode this morning, the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, it wasn't the fact that these wise men came from afar having studied the skies for years. It wasn't the fact that they perhaps travelled so far, maybe taking them several years to reach their searched for destination. Nor was it the fact that they had the audacity to say to King Herod that we haven't come to worship you we have come to worship the one for whom we have heard about who is born King of the Jews, can you tell us how to find him? A crazy move by anyone's thinking. It's not even the fact that it is scripture, in fact Micah 5:2-4 read by those who know the law and the scriptures that confirms the science of astrology to the reality of the Christ-child, and yet the irony is they, the Pharisees and scribes still don't get it. What got me in this the first chapter of this box series is that the Kings in all their radiant exotic eastern splendour, knelt in awe and wonder and paid homage to this tiny, needy, suckling baby boy who they were convinced was the King of the Jews. And their gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh represented that awe & wonder. Words could not express those feelings but the gifts did - only the very very best.

Awe and wonder. Never mind that the 3 wise men may well be kneeling in dirty smelly straw, and that in their rich and splendid clothes they were the ones out of place, they had at last found who they had heard about long ago, had longed to find and yearned to see and now they are in the presence of the One. A couple of weeks before Christmas a friend of mine shared a video with me. It was a video of his 18 month old grandson seeing the Christmas tree lit up for the very first time. Imagine the look on his little face; it was literally a look of awe and wonder and joy and it was just so beautiful to witness. The little boy was not pretending, he was not putting it on for anybody else - it was a genuine response to what was before him; there were no words, words were not needed. It was if he was standing on holy ground. The three Kings response to at last seeing the King of the Jews, was to fall to their knees - 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth' (Phil 2: 10)

The other readings in the lectionary this morning too give us this sense of awe and wonder: Isaiah speaks in extravagant terms; 'Kings, come to the brightness of your dawn.....then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice' the

Psalmist goes further in psalm 72; 'May the Kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute....may all the kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.' They all fall down before this child. And from Paul in the reading from Ephesians we can hear the passion Paul has for the awe & wonder of his personal epiphany, to bring the good news to all; 'to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things'.

In hearing this part of the gospel again, a story we hear year after year have we perhaps lost the ability to fall down before this child in awe and wonder as the three wise men did 2000 years ago? We may not have the richest of gifts to offer, gold, frankincense and myrrh, but that does not mean that what we give him is not rich. We too like the wise men are on a journey; human life is a journey and we as Christians take this journey in search of the one who calls us beyond ourselves into faithful service - One before whom we are prepared to kneel in awe and wonder and offer the best of our gifts, flawed and unworthy as they may be. It may be gold we can give or a simple prayer, or perhaps a broken and hungry heart or eager hands and feet, or perhaps even bread and a meal shared together - these all may be our genuine response to the gift of life, lying here in a manger.

Today we watch as these visitors full of grace & dignity kneel before what is to them simplicity and vulnerability and poverty because in their wisdom they know that this is where glory resides hidden for now in this place and in this child. So I invite us all today to kneel beside these royal men on the stable floor in awe and wonder and offer our gifts. And may we in this season of epiphany and beyond be carried by the sense of awe and wonder and let it carry us through every situation as we offer our gift to the One who has gifted us with life.