

Epiphany People

The town of Newmarket, in Suffolk, is a town completely dominated by horseracing. To all intents and purposes it is the beating heart of the horseracing world. It's almost impossible to drive through the town without having to stop for horses to cross the road as they make their way to the training gallops on the Jockey Club Estate. Entire roads are dedicated to specialist training yards, where world famous trainers look after their multi-million pound thoroughbreds. There are specialist equine vets in the town; livestock agents and Tattersalls bloodstock headquarters; there's even the British School of Racing where wannabe jockeys perfect their art. And then, of course, there's the racecourse, where all the hard work of the breeding, training and exercising is put to the ultimate test on some of the most famous turf in the world.

I remember once, when I worked at Newmarket, speaking to an elderly gentleman who had worked in the town all his life. He had been a stable hand at one of the large training yards and had worked with some of the most famous trainers and racehorses in the last half-century or so. And yet, despite this lifetime in the industry, he had never stepped foot on a racecourse on a raceday. Not once had he ever seen, for himself, the result of all his hard work put into action on the track.

Sometimes it can be very easy for us to lose sight of what's right in front of us. We can just get on with what we're doing, day in, day out, and miss the point of what it's actually all about. For the scribes in the gospel story this morning, the good news was on their doorstep, and yet they were stuck, entrenched, unmoved. They could quote the Prophets from their treasured Scriptures that foretold of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, but when travelers from the East appeared, speaking of heavenly sightings that pointed to the arrival of a new king on earth, the scribes showed no interest in going to investigate.

Rather than the respected religious authorities in Jerusalem, when it came to the crunch, it was the magi, the strangers who had travelled from afar, those outside of the chosen people of Israel, who saw what God was doing and responded. It was they who were willing to leave their familiar surroundings, their wealth and their homeland, to journey out into the unknown with gifts for a foreign king.

This visit by the magi, the wise men, to the new-born Christ child, is of course what we celebrate today as we keep the feast of Epiphany, transferred from its proper date of the 6th January. The word itself means 'manifestation': an event or action that clearly shows or reveals something previously hidden or unseen. You may have noticed on glass doors in office buildings or doctor's surgeries or hospitals where there are large glass panels, that there is often a line of spots or similar that show you there is glass there and stop you from walking into them. Those spots or patterns are called window manifestations – they reveal something, the glass, that was otherwise hidden from view. The same is the case with the visit of the magi.

Through the visit of these wise men, or kings as they are sometimes referred to, with their unusual gifts for a baby boy, the true identity of this new-born child is revealed and made manifest for the world to see. It takes strangers from outside the religious authorities of Israel, gentiles, to see God's action at work in the world, and to respond. It is through the work of these 'outsiders' that the true nature of God's Son is revealed and made known, thus showing God's plan to include everyone in this great act of love, and not just the chosen few.

So how, I wonder, is Jesus made manifest in our world, in Heathfield, today? Jesus' very work and ministry was to manifest the power, presence and love of God to the world. How does he do it

today through you and me – the body of Christ? How does he do it through the Church here in Heathfield?

As disciples of Jesus, **we** bring the love, life and laughter of Jesus to the bit of the world we interact with; to the society we belong to; to the association we are part of; to the work we do; to the places we go to shop or relax, the people we visit and many more. In our Worship as we gather together to share and to listen to God's Word through the preaching and teaching of the bible, Jesus speaks to us, encourages us, heals us – His life and light are here. In our Worship as we give thanks for all that Jesus has done for us – we meet Him manifest in the broken bread and wine outpoured.

Such a view transforms the way we look at the things we do and the relationships we have. We become an 'Epiphany People', manifesting the light and life of Jesus every day. This is a vision in which we truly become Disciples of Christ; in which we reveal the true identity of the one we worship; a vision in which we are caught up in God's mission of salvation in the world today. As Rowan Williams put it: "Mission is finding out what God is doing, and joining in." The magi did this big time! And we too are called to seek out what God is doing in our midst and to join in.

Don't let us lose sight of that which is going on right in front of us. Don't let's work in the stables day by day, week by week, and never visit the racecourse – let us seek out where God is at work, and get involved. Just as the magi did, let us discern God's actions in the world, and have the courage to leave our familiar surroundings and join in; let us travel faithfully, following the signs provided for us, that we too may arrive at the throne of glory, to offer our own gifts to the Lord.

In the coming days and weeks, we, as a Benefice, will be working together to seek a new vision for the Anglican Church in this place.

We will be asking for God to reveal to us where and how he is already at work in this town, and seeking to identify ways in which we can get involved.

To do this successfully, we are to become an 'Epiphany people', a people called to reveal the reality of the love and the grace and the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ; a people called to manifest the light and life of Jesus every day.

So however you will be involved in the process, whether as an active participant in the workshops and discussions, or whether quietly in praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in leading us towards a renewed vision for the Benefice, may each one of us seek to make real, to make visible in our lives, the love and life of Jesus; that we too, may become an Epiphany people.

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