

## Epiphany – Sun 7 Jan 2018

### Props:

- Litter bag

Isa 9.6-7

Mt 2.1-12

### Quiz

About what is Stephen passionate?

- Cheese & Chocolate
- Skiing & Sailing
- Family & Friends
- Physics
- Jesus
- Cats

and

- ... Litter, esp Recycling

## Litter Picking

As I walked up the road to church, I was mulling over as to what I could possibly say to you today.

It's Epiphany ... the Three Kings and all that.

Did I tell you how I dislike the whole Xmas thing ?

[Scrooge]

When I walk to church .... Bag ... Litter

Drives me up the wall. I hate it.

Recycling.

[Victor Meldrew]

Most people don't like seeing litter in our village (or anywhere, other than in a bin).

We hope that *someone else* will pick it up.

But to all the someone else, we are the someone else.

If I don't pick it up, who will ?

So if I am **convinced** that this matters, I also needed to be **committed** enough to actually do something, overcome my revulsion and make our village a bit more pleasant.

## Modern Xmas story

### Mary, Joe and JC.

Not very popular. Affordable housing.

Mary wins the National Lottery.

The locals celebrate and they become very popular.

The Nat Lottery arrange for stars of "I'm a Celebrity", "The Only Way is Essex", "Strictly" to present them with a cheque.

No ... this is about Mary ... we forgot the baby.

### Mary, Joe and JC.

Not very popular. Affordable housing.

JC identified as the 100 millionth baby born in UK since records began.

TV crew notified and dispatched.

### Prime Minister visits, Arch Bishop of Canterbury and Brian Cox.

They bring £100 in Govt bonds, Children's Bible & signed photo of himself.

Seems to be missing a certain something compared to the original.

## Matthew 2

Let's look again at the bible story.

Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked,  
“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?  
We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

...

... they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

### Three “kings”

μάγοι ... magicians

Traditionally:

- Melchior – a Persian scholar;
- Caspar –an Indian scholar;
- Balthazar –a Babylonian scholar.

Three ? Well three gifts ...

Does anyone know the joke of the three scholars ?

No ? Pity ...might have livened up this sermon.

## The Gifts

Turn to a popular carol:

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never,  
Over us all to reign.

Gold – king

Frankincense to offer have I;  
Incense owns a Deity nigh;  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship Him God Most High.

Frankincense – holiness, righteousness; god.

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

Myrrh (etymology “bitter) – pain killer (drink before crucifixion Mk 15.23), anointing oil, death (Jn 19.39).

Fr. Cornelius a' Lapide (last great Jesuit biblical scholar):

“Myrrh has the property of drying up moisture, and preventing the generation of worms.”

The Syrian King Seleucus II Callinicus is recorded to have offered gold, frankincense and myrrh (among other items) to Apollo in his temple at Miletus in 243 BC,

## Getting to the guts of this

**Magi** from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born **king of the Jews**? We saw **his star** when it rose... well we think it was a star and not a plane ... and we have come to **worship him.**” ... they **bowed down and worshiped him.** Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of **gold, frankincense and myrrh.**

1. “**born King of the Jews**” ... not “We have seen a star in the sky. Could this mean that a baby has been born who could possibly be KoJ?”
2. “**We have come to worship him**” ... not “We are going to say ‘Hi’ on the off chance that he might end up as someone of importance.”  
To Mary & Joe: “Oh he doesn’t look like a king.” “You are not royal, so how come this baby is supposed to be the KoJ” (actually both have royal connections back to David, although ...)
3. **Expensive gifts** ... not “We brought him a train set from Toys R Us, but if he really is a king, we will return with something better.”

They were **CONVINCED** ... they didn’t need birth certificates, paternity tests, etc.

But conviction is one thing.  
It doesn’t get the job done.  
It doesn’t pick up the litter.

The TWM could have stayed at home and read about JC on the **BBC news website**.

So why did the TWM visit ? Would the world have been different if they hadn't? Who benefitted ?

- a) **Mary & Joe** probably benefitted – we read in Lk 2.19 that after the visit of three shepherds, Mary “treasured these things in her heart” ... if a bunch of scruffy shepherds, had this effect on her, how much more of an effect would a set of well-spoken, well-educated, well-dressed, perfumed dignitaries have had on M&J ? And then there were the expensive gifts ... the Shepherds simply “ooo”ed and “ah”ed. But the TWM came with messages of Kingship, Deity and Death ... the first two confirmation of what Gabriel had said to Mary (Lk 1) ... the third a potential shock, perhaps. The TWM confirmed the prophecies ... so Jesus's emerging signs of Messiah-hood would be less surprising.
- b) I don't think **Jesus** was born thinking “I'm King of the World. I'm God. I'm invincible.” ... I suspect there was a dawning realisation: as God revealed things to the Jesus the young man; as Mary explained to her inquisitive son about the prophecies and his birth. The TWM visit would have helped Jesus accept who he was.
- c) **We** have the confirmation of people who were around at the time of Jesus's birth, at least within a couple of years; confirmation of the narrative as to who Jesus is and would be. It all fits together in a consistent way.

The conviction of the TWM helped convince M, J & JC. It helps convince us.

But I don't think this is why the TWM visited.

I believe they visited because they wanted to. They had to.

This was so important, it had to be done.

And so it wasn't a matter of popping down to the local branch of **Herod's** ... I mean **Harrods's** ... and buying some *really* expensive gifts and getting them delivered. They said goodbye to their families, saddled their camels and set off for an obscure village in an obscure country.

This was not a straightforward road-trip ... undoubtedly there were brigands to be avoided and a tangle with the local dictator.

This was so important that their conviction of the truth of this story led to the **COMMITMENT** to follow through.

And what about us ?

What about our **Conviction** ?

What about our **Commitment** ?

It's possible to be **convinced**, but not **committed** – litter doesn't pick itself up.

It's possible to be **committed**, but not **convinced** ... the fishermen at our sailing club are **committed** to gathering up all their rubbish from the day and placing it in a plastic sack ... alas there are not **convinced** of the importance of keeping the countryside tidy, so they bung the bags in the ditch.



As we start the new year, I would encourage us to take on the joint New Year's resolutions of

- a) Ensuring we are **convinced**
- b) Demonstrating this through our **commitment**.

Perhaps we are struggling with the **conviction** thing.

- There is a god ? A god who **created the Universe** ? A god who **created me** and loves me ? A god who cares ?
- A god who came to earth in the form of a **baby** ... who **died** for me ?
- A god who will welcome me into **Heaven** at the end of my earthly life ?

This is an awfully big ask.

And it is either true or rubbish.

Sometimes I look at the Universe: the **cosmic** and the **microscopic** ... and I think "Really ?"

Does the existence of God really explain this ?

I simply don't understand it all.

Then I step back on to "safe" ground.

And even if I don't understand it all, I look at the **Jesus of history**, I look at the **Jesus in my heart**.

And I say "Yes ... I believe"

In 2018,

- Will you take the **steps** to convince yourself of the reality of God the Father, Son and Spirit ?
- Will you read your **bible** to learn the truth?
- Will you engage with **Christian friends** to explore the mysteries and practice of faith ?
- Will you open your **hearts** to let Jesus in ?

Will you let these be part of your New Year's resolutions ?

And as we grow in **conviction**, will we also grow in **commitment** ?

Will we commit to

- **Grow in our faith**
  - To serve God
  - To serve one another
  - To give of our resources: our time, our skills, our wealth?

**[verse]**

Glorious now behold Him arise;  
King and God and sacrifice;  
[Alleluia!](#), Alleluia!,  
Earth to Heaven replies.

How will you reply in 2018 ?

**[Conviction, Commitment]**