

## Communion Service Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January – led by Mike Findley



*With the church calendar offering us the choice of either observing the second Sunday of Christmas or marking Epiphany, Mike had opted for the latter – and we were to explore its significance together. The Lectionary, he noted, was confusing; the prescribed readings for the previous Sunday had covered the flight to Egypt following the visit from the wise men, whose arrival was to be a part of this week's reading. Having enjoyed the '12 days of Christmas' last week in Part-1 of the 'Ramsay Sandwich' we'd been spared this confusion, so it would be for David next week to deal with Jesus' baptism some 30 years later, along with being left alone in the temple many years previously.*

**Epiphany**, celebrated on the 6th of January, was a time rich with symbolism, both theologically and culturally. In many Spanish-speaking countries, Epiphany was marked by grand

processions and the exchange of gifts, but at its heart, Epiphany was about recognising all the gifts God had given us and reflecting on their meaning for our lives.

The wise men, who were neither ethnically nor religiously Jewish, had come from afar. Their journey and the gifts they brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—carried profound symbolism.

- Gold represented all the gifts from God: life, power, existence, and creation. It served as a reminder of the abundance and blessings we received.
- Frankincense symbolised awe, mystery, and adoration. It called us to marvel at the beauty of the world around us (especially on a frosty, sunlit winter morning) and to respect creation because it came from God,
- Myrrh stood for pain and the need for relief from sorrow. It prompted us to consider whether we only turned to God in times of trouble, forgetting Him during moments of joy. Myrrh also invited reflection on the need for salvation and healing.

The star that had guided the wise men was another powerful symbol. At Christmas, we'd celebrated that light had entered the world—a light that could not be extinguished. This light not only illuminated the way but also exposed the hidden, murky corners of our lives. It was a challenge and an invitation to examine those neglected areas and seek renewal.

The wise men had demonstrated faith and determination. Though their exact origins were uncertain (they were thought to have been astrologers or Zoroastrian priests from Persia), they had embarked on a long journey not knowing precisely where they were headed, and had sought guidance along the way. Their story was a metaphor for our own journeys of faith: did we try to chart our own paths, or did we ask other people to help to point us along the right way?

The reading from Ephesians had emphasised that Epiphany was part of a larger, historic plan from God. God did not abandon the world; instead, He provided a path for reconciliation. God's actions often surprised us, unfolding in ways we did not expect—such as sending a baby to change the world, rather than intervening with power and force. But perhaps the most important message from Epiphany was that Jesus was for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status. Paul's calling to spread the gospel to non-Jews had been radical at the time, but it underscored the inclusivity of the Christian message. The Christmas story had featured shepherds—ordinary, perhaps uneducated people—alongside the wise men, illustrating that the good news was for all. The symbolism of gifts, light, faith and determination, and being part of God's plan all came together in this core message: the gospel was for everyone, especially those who were different from us.

Too often, Mike told us, churches focused on welcoming those who were like themselves. We should Imagine how transformative it could be if each of us made a resolution to bring just one person unlike ourselves into church—someone of a different colour, background, or social status. Wouldn't that change the world.

And Mike concluded with a reflection from Sheila Walker, which he felt encapsulated the essence of Epiphany:

"This is what I do know. But when the planets cease to spin, the tides of all the affairs of men recede, and the heavens stand for a moment still. That star will stand there, where it stood before. Over its most famous son. And the star is the opposite of a black hole. It's the dazzling wholeness, drawing all things, all men and women, to itself. From East and West nations, Kings, sons and daughters. Herds of camels, fleets of ships, and flights of birds and planes. Wise men of every kind and gender. Those who knew, and those who thought they didn't want to know. Mountains, trees, and all creation. Not to swallow them up, use and discard them, a passing craze, as is the way of the world. No, but to welcome them, one and all. Inviting them to make their true, their final home, in the place of praise. And this I also know, this that we, who follow the sun. We are to hold our course. We are to shine like stars over a storm-tossed sea, until that defining hour when the Earth slows and the world sees whose star is forever in the ascendancy."

Mike encouraged us to hold our course and shine like stars over a storm-tossed world, inviting others—especially those who are different—into the light of Epiphany.