

**Matthew 2: 1-12**  
**“Everybody’s looking for something”**

The biblical story of the visit of the magi has been elaborated over the centuries. They’ve been called kings, given names, their gifts have been interpreted and they’ve become the spangly-cloaked stars of virtually every nativity play, except the ones with a real donkey of course! We’re off to Spain to spend New Year with our daughter and will still be there for Epiphany when the massive three kings parades in Madrid are live on national TV and local parades draw huge crowds onto the streets.

What is it that fascinates us about these three? Well, firstly I think it is the fact that they have undertaken a quest. Whether it’s exploring the deepest parts of the ocean, Strictly, or Star Trek we are all captivated by the idea of a journey of discovery. As the Eurhythmics said a very long time ago “Everybody is looking for something.”

We may not be world class athletes seeking to be ‘the best’ in their discipline or participants in reality TV seeking fame at almost any cost but it seems to me that the vast majority of us humans are seekers,

willing to undergo hardships and inconveniences to achieve our goal. E.g.

A financially secure life-style

Happiness

Loving relationships

Good Health

To find ‘the real me’ and to be myself

To be released into freedom from the traumas of the past

A peaceful death

These are reasonable and healthy things. But I wonder, could they all be specific examples of one overarching quest: to find love. Don’t we all yearn to receive love and to be able to love ourselves.

This leads to the second reason that we are so fascinated by the Maji. For those of us who are not Jewish, they are the first glimpse that Jesus has come to us too. The longed-for Messiah is welcomed and worshipped by Gentile philosopher-scientists from far away, not only by local working people. He brings the possibility of the God who is love into the wider world and disparate communities. Malcolm Guite writes about this in his poem based on this story.

“Epiphany” Malcolm Guite

It might have been just someone else’s story,  
Some chosen people get a special king.  
We leave them to their own peculiar glory,  
We don’t belong, it doesn’t mean a thing.  
But when these three arrive they bring us with them,  
Gentiles like us, their wisdom might be ours;  
A steady step that finds an inner rhythm,  
A pilgrim’s eye that sees beyond the stars.  
They did not know his name but still they sought him,  
They came from elsewhere but still they found;  
In temples they found those who sold and bought  
him,  
But in the filthy stable, hallowed ground.  
Their courage gives our questing hearts a voice  
To seek, to find, to worship, to rejoice.

So, what wisdom can we glean from the story of the Magi for our own quest? Well for me I think that one of the most helpful features of the story is that the Magi were prepared to accept the unexpected. The child of refugee peasants can hardly be the king they expected to find; yet they were overjoyed to have reached his home. Their gifts must have seemed incongruous; yet they opened them and worshipped

the child Jesus. They offer us a glimpse of what it means to find Love. (Capital L love, love above and beyond a kiss on New Year’s Eve. Love that grows in us peace and well-being.) As we remember them the Magi bring us along with them and show us that we find the object of our quest in worshipping Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Messiah who came to show human beings how great the love of God is for each one of us; who came to show us how that love would grow and be lived out in the perfect human life. When we think about it in these terms God sent his son Jesus to earth on the greatest quest of all time, ‘To seek and to save the lost’. Ultimately the child of Bethlehem gave his life so that each of us could rediscover the wholeness that we have been created to enjoy but that we have lost by doing things our own way with no reference to God. As an adult Jesus said ‘Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends’ (Jn 15: 13). And that is exactly what Jesus did for all people in all times and places. For this reason, he is the object of our quest to receive love and to understand that we are loveable.

The story of the Maji reminds us of all this. And dear friends, I hope that for each one of us here this morning, whatever challenges we face in our quest for the specifics of seeking those quite reasonable things on or earlier list,

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we know that love, and the presence of the great Comforter, the Holy Spirit planting words of love in our hearts, growing them and watering them. (If today you can't hear that whisper of love, do please ask me, or one of the team here to pray with you, to sit with you and journey with you as you listen.) But the Maji's story shows us more than a meeting with Love and the glorious ending of a quest. It shows us what happened next ... They went home by another route. So, for those of us here who have found the object of our quest in Jesus, their story poses a question. Will we allow our encounter with Love, the

good news that Jesus came and lived and died and rose again, to change us, and our way of life, even if the only place we're going is home?

Some of us may be looking forward to exciting holidays, or new jobs or amazing new opportunities, but honestly, some others will be anticipating a lot more 'keeping on keeping on' in 2025! However, Jesus has sent us out on a different track, definitely a narrow road and maybe at times through a valley filled with shade as dark as death, but one that takes us back through God's world to our own communities and families to tell our story not only in words but in actions sustained by the Holy Spirit. Howard Thurman calls this 'the work of Christmas'.

“The Work of Christmas” Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone, a  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among others,  
To make music in the heart.

Friends, as we begin a new calendar year on  
Tuesday, let's make this work the basis for our  
resolutions and our prayers as we worship Jesus  
together.