

O God,

who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

And now we give you thanks

for, by the leading of a star,
you have revealed your only Son to the world,
that in following him
we are led from darkness into his marvellous light.

Lord God,

the bright splendour whom the nations seek:
may we who with the wise men
have been drawn by your light
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

May God the Father,

who led the wise men by the shining of a star
to find the Christ, the Light from light,
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.

Gold for a king,

Incense for a God

Myrrh foreshadowing death.

That's how we interpret the wise men's gifts.

Knowing how hectic any Christmas is,

let alone one where you cross half the world on camels,

hoping for a clear night sky to chart your course,

I guess choosing presents was the last thing on their mind.

So they rocked up at the stable and thought,

'Heck, what on earth can we give him.

What have we got on us?'

The gold would be the modern day version

of the credit card,

guaranteeing their long tedious return journey

would be cheered by the luxury of five star hotels.

Because of the one star they gave their gold away
and would have to slum it.

We do not know what the star of Bethlehem was.

We were not there,

whether it was a planetary conjunction,

a comet,

a miracle or a pious parable coloured by OT texts.

Whatever!

The real star of Matthew's Gospel

is the person it leads us to.

With their gold gone,

the hovels they were forced to stay in

would have been, to say the least, a bit whiffy.

The fragrant incense

would have ameliorated the stench.

In his letter to the Philippians,
St Paul counted everything else as 'garbage'
compared to gaining Christ,
and 'garbage' is a very polite translation
of the original Greek.

The wise men gained Christ
and after that the 'garbage' held no fears for them.

In fact it would remind them
of the odour of the stable
and the light they had found there.

And what of the myrrh?

It would have been their insurance policy
in case any of them had died on route.

Their body would have been embalmed in myrrh
to survive the long trek home for a state funeral.

There was a bishop of Bath and Wells in the 17th century
called Thomas Ken,
author of the morning hymn,
Awake my soul.

Good Bishop Ken took along his funeral shroud
to wherever he happened to be staying -
that must have made for a great party.

But he wanted to be buried properly in the finest linen.

The wise men gave away
their version of the funeral shroud
and would have to be buried where they fell.

The tremendous light they saw in the stable
made them content with
being broke, smelly, a pauper's grave.

They gave away what they had got on them,
gaining the surpassing wealth of Christ.

What have we got on us this Epiphany 2020

that we can give in exchange for Christ?

What has Christ got on us?

All our mean-ness, the pettiness, the selfishness, the sin:

leave them at his cradle.

But all the kindness, the gentleness,

the love which goes the extra mile,

sometimes the extra light year.

Don't be so hard on yourselves.

Stop and notice those moments in your own lives,

marking moments of light before the Light.

And let that Light flood into you,

you brightest and best

of the sons and daughters of the morning,

as you return to your own kingdoms by another route,

changed for ever.