

Scripture Reflection: January The great “Reveal”



“This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son”.
Mtt. 2:12

After the opening chapter of Matthew’s gospel which sets the Jewish historical scene for Jesus’ birth, he goes on to tell one of the most beautiful and memorable stories in the whole of the Bible. Which child and adult does not know the story of the “Wise men” or “The Three Kings”?

Matthew learnt the craft of telling parables, stories to explain a particular truth, from his teacher, Jesus. Jesus must have explained to his disciples how to teach. People love stories and will remember them. They will go away and think about them. They will find the meaning as they reflect and the meaning will be more important because they have brought themselves to the story.

So, Matthew begins his fantastic story which unfolds like a great pantomime. We have the baddie king sitting in his glorious court surrounded by his finely dressed courtiers and in walks the three “goodies”.

They walk into the den of evil and coolly say “Where is the child, who has been born to be king of the Jews? For we have seen his star at its rising, and we have come to pay him homage” How dare they say this to the already King of the Jews!

Well imagine the scene next when Herod is infuriated and all his fellow baddies too, and they plot to find out what is happening. He recalls the wise men to find out more and everyone thinks “No, escape quickly! He’ll kill you! He’s behind you!”

The scene for Matthew’s early listeners would have said, “Well this story is very like the one about our

great ancestor, Moses, in the court of Pharaoh, when he went and said, “Set my people free!” Look what happened then. A great massacre followed.

And sure enough, what does Herod do next but send out his soldiers to kill all the young children in Bethlehem. But, just like in the Passover story of Moses, God intervenes and saves the holy family and they escape into Egypt (perfectly linking the two events in the mind of his listeners). Jesus has come to set his people free, as he said in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. Perfect! The beginning of his ministry and his birth, tell of God’s plan from the beginning of his life: he was born for this salvation of humanity.

And in the story, the goodies are the gentiles: the wise men represent the inclusion of all humanity in God’s loving purpose for us all.

The wise men have an “open heart” or “open mind” and though their religion was centred on Moon and star worship they were prepared to go and seek the truth. Their “world view,” (as Immanuel Kant 1790 calls it), was radically changed, and Matthew’s final words of the passage say “they left for their own country by a *different road*.”

“Nothing in the world - indeed nothing even beyond the world - can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a good will. I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.” (Kant)

“Peace on Earth to people of good will”