

**May I speak in the name of the living God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Today, as we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany, we reflect upon the journey of the wise men to worship the newborn Christ Child and think about the gifts that they brought.

No one really knows the exact identity of these travellers, or exactly where they came from.

Perhaps it is the element of mystery around the identity of these wise men, that has over the years given rise to a number of different legends about them.

Many of you will be familiar, with the Russian folk tale of Baboushka – who was invited to journey with the wise men, but bogged down in all the day to day issue of her life, she

delayed, and so spent the rest of her life searching for the new king – carrying and leaving gifts, just in case he should be there.

Another similar legend, which I would like to share with you this morning, is that of Artaban. This legend says that there were not three magi, as we traditionally believe, but four.

***The name of the fourth was Artaban...***

The best known presents given at the first Christmas are Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh, given by the three wise men.

However legend has it that there was a fourth wise man, whose name was Artaban. He travelled from Persia to meet the others carrying with him his gift for the new King - three precious jewels - a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl.

On his way Artaban met an old Jew by the roadside, who was almost dying from fever. He decided to stay with the sick man until he was well and so he missed the other three wise men who completed their journey to Bethlehem .

The Jew told Artaban that the prophets said that the King would be born in Bethlehem . To make such a journey it was necessary to form a caravan and buy expensive supplies and equipment. So Artaban sold his costly sapphire to raise money and he set out for Bethlehem .

When he arrived in Bethlehem and made enquiries he was told that the other wise men had left 3 days before. A young mother told him that the family he was seeking had fled and that Bethlehem was in fear of King Herod. While Artaban was in the town, the soldiers arrived with orders to kill all the baby boys.

The young mother was very frightened for her young son and when the captain of the soldiers ordered the child to be killed, Artaban came to the rescue and gave his ruby to the soldiers to save the boy.

Artaban sought for the King for many years, although he only had one of his gifts left - the pearl. Finally, after 30 years searching, he came to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. The city was buzzing with talk about the man named Jesus who claimed to be the son of God and who was to be crucified. Artaban wondered whether he could use his last jewel to save the life of this man, Jesus.

But as he hurried through the streets of the city Artaban came across a young girl who was crying. She told Artaban she was crying because she was going to be sold into slavery to pay her father's debts. Artaban could not pass by and leave the girl crying so he gave her the pearl, the last of his jewels. At that moment the city was rocked by an earthquake and Artaban saw Jesus on the cross.

So Artaban was not able to worship his King. His precious gifts had been sold, or given away, to help others on his long journey.

Yet Artaban had worshiped his King and served him by using the gifts he had to help other people

This is our way of serving God - by helping, sharing and being kind to other people

Legends like this, and the account that Matthew gives us in his gospel of the journey of the wise men, teach us a number of important things about our journey of faith.

Firstly, they tell us something about the importance of vision.

The magi saw the star. It was the star that instilled in them the belief that something special had taken place. It was the star that gave them the conviction that they needed to be part of what had happened. It was the guiding light of the star which gave them the courage and determination to set out on a journey to find the new king, even though they did not know exactly where it would lead them.

As we journey through life, we need vision. We need guiding principles. We need something to give us hope and courage as we journey forward.

This is as true in our spiritual lives, as it is in our lives generally. The most successful businesses, are ones that have clear vision. They know where they want to get, and put in place strategies to help them achieve their goals.

Most organisations these days have what in the jargon is called a mission statement – in a few words or phrases, it encapsulates everything that the organisation is about and gives every member a shared vision of where they are heading.

In retelling the story of the magi coming to the Christ child, Matthew in his gospel clearly wants us and all his readers to have a shared understanding of what the mission of Jesus is all about. It is about bringing the light of God's love into the lives of all people. Jesus has not come just for the Jews, but for all peoples – for the magi who came from the east, were gentiles – they too saw and recognised, that in the person of Jesus Christ, God was doing something very special and wonderful in the life of the world – they too recognised that they needed to be part of it.

As we reflect upon this vision today – the words of the prayer of St Francis give us a good starting point, as we try to focus on what sharing in vision means in our lives:

**Lord, make me an instrument of your  
peace.**

**Where there is hatred,  
let me sow your love.**

**Where there is injury, pardon.**

**Where there is doubt, faith.**

**Where there is darkness, light.**

**Where there is despair, hope.**

**And where there is sadness, joy.**

If each day of this new year we hold these words in heart and mind and try to live out their implications, we shall indeed be sharing in bringing the light of God's love into the lives of all who we meet.

The second thing that the journey of the magi teach us, is about the importance of faith and courage.

The journey they made cannot have been an easy one. Across dessert and mountain ranges. Through town and countryside, with the constant threat of being attacked by bandits.

The magi clearly needed faith and determination to keep on going, even when the light of the star which had caused them to set out on their journey was at times out of site, hidden by clouds.

In our journey through life, we need faith and determination too. We experience times when the journey of life is easy, but also times, when it feels like climbing the highest mountain imaginable, or crossing the widest dessert.

The legend of Artaban, which we heard a moment ago, tells of the way in which he kept on searching throughout his life – through many difficulties, many times of doubt and despair. The thing that kept him going was his absolute conviction and belief in the object of his search. To draw close to the new King was something important – something worth devoting his life too.

Our Christian Journey, our pilgrimage of faith, is something that we stick at, through thick and thin, because we know that to draw close to God, and to seek to serve the one who came to give his life for us, is something worth devoting our lives too. It gives meaning, purpose and direction to all that we do.

At the start of this new year, let us pray for courage in all that lies ahead, for wisdom and discernment, so that all the opportunities and challenges we meet, may serve to strengthen our faith and our determination to follow in the way of Christ.

Thirdly, the Gospels, along with this legend of Artaban, serve to remind us that it is in serving others, we are in a very real and tangible way serving Christ.

Jesus himself said, - in as much as you have done this unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

Artaban, in distributing his precious gifts to those in need, had drawn close in heart and mind to what Jesus was all about. His giving mirrored and reflected the love of Christ – and in a sense, made him present.

Although 2000 years separates us from the historical birth of Christ, as we offer our gifts of time and energy, our gifts of love and generosity, the gift of our hearts to God, we too mirror and reflect the love of Christ and make him present in the life of our world today.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, this day reminds us of the journey of the wise men,  
Give us their sense of vision,  
Their courage to follow where you lead in faith and trust,  
Their desire to be part of making your love known to all people,  
And as we recommit ourselves to the journey of faith, we ask you to accept now our worship and offer ourselves in joyful service, to the honour and glory of your name. Amen