

Matthew 2:1-12 – Openness to God in 2019 – OUR VISION AT ST. MARY'S

Coming to end of Christmas season – on this the 12th day of Christmas, also known as Epiphany, we get one last hurrah. I love the wise men, they're probably my favourite nativity characters (apart from Jesus, obviously). And today is all about them. But why do I love them so much? Not just the sense of the exotic or their strange gifts, though that helps: the wise men remind us that the good news of Jesus' coming into the world is for everyone – God meets *all of us* where we are, and leads the most unlikely people to worship him. And that includes people like you, or me.

How will you worship God this year? Where will he lead you? What signs is he giving you? What will you offer him? What is your dream?

I want to reflect for a few minutes on what this text might be saying to us as a church. Do spend time this week thinking about it for you personally and if any of it relates to us here, then great, make sure you tell me! But what about us as a community?

I need to share something significant which some of you already know, but needs to be made public to all of you. At the end of November I learnt that the diocese was pulling out of its commitment to give us a new full-time pioneer minister to come and plant a church in the new estate this year. I must also say that there is no possibility of a reversal of this decision, it is final.

Needless to say, it was a heavy blow and I spent some time trying to understand why and what the options were instead. In a nutshell they've made a permanent change to how they intend to start new churches, essentially opting to try and start a lot of small things rather than a few big things, and we are the first and probably worst casualty of the change, as we were at the top of the list. We discussed it at length in the stewards' council early in December. I've also spent a lot of time in prayer over the last few weeks, and although I must say it still hurts I am also convinced that God actually has a different plan for us – one which is in some ways far more exciting. **I believe that he wants us to go ahead anyway, and to do this ourselves.**

It's a bold call, but I really believe God intends to do something amazing, something we can tell our grandchildren about in years to come (if we have them). We're gathering a team and we'll be soaking it in prayer – but this is the sign that God has given us and it's now up to us to follow this particular star. It might not be the sign we wanted but in a funny way it does fulfil the last bit of the text we've been using this last year – I wonder if you remember it from Psalm 126:

*Restore our fortunes O lord, like streams in the desert;
those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.*

God is restoring our fortunes, there's so much going on here now and lots to look forward to in this coming year – but as yet there were no tears, and to be honest I didn't really want that bit to be true, so I forgot about it. But, thanks to the diocese, tears have been shed now, which in a funny way is some comfort. As I shared at the beginning of last year, this is our season of sowing, in fact let's call it our **season of planting**. Our commitment to TRY has yielded great fruit already –

think of Cafe Church, Quiz Nights, Prayer after services, the Remembrance weekend – well here's the biggest TRY of all.

And that means I need each and every one of you. We need people to get stuck in – not just with whatever might start to happen on the new estate, but back here too, in fact *especially here* so that we don't just rob Peter to pay Paul. My question about gifts has a new urgency: so many of you are committed here, and thank you to all of you who are, but maybe for a few this is your time to get in the game a bit more. Maybe there's a new gift you can offer, a new role you could take on.

This is a once in a generation moment for us. This estate will only be built once. The conversations we're having with the community who want us to be at the heart of the new development will only happen in this season. *This is our moment.* It is also our fork in the road, if you will: this is what will determine whether people talk about St Mary's in 20 years' time as a the story you'll tell your grandchildren, how God did amazing things and transformed us; or we'll be left out in the cold and the mantle will be passed on to others.

I look around and I firmly believe that we can be that transformed church, that God wants to reveal his glory through us. We might not feel like that kind of church, but every time I go back to the bible I read that God chooses the weak to shame the strong, he chooses Gideon, he chooses the youngest of 8 David, he chooses the son of a carpenter, he chooses some star-gazers to be invited guests at the nativity.....

The wise men remind us that the good news of Jesus' coming into the world is for everyone – God meets all of us where we are, and leads the most unlikely people to worship him. All he asks is for hearts that are open to him.

How will you worship God this year? Where will he lead you? What signs is he giving you? What will you offer him? What is your dream?

Let's be open to God's work in our lives this year. (ADD CHURCH BIT)