

Bearerers of Gifts from Afar

Matthew teaches a salutary lesson in the tale of this extraordinary visit of the Magi to the child Jesus. Though, as pagans, they presumably know nothing of the God of the Jews or of his special relationship with his Chosen People or of their expectation of a Messiah, they seem a deal more open to the will and presence of God than Jesus' own people. They respond positively and enthusiastically as God reveals to them through their own arcane arts, the birth of his Son, the infant king of the Jews. They make an arduous journey to honour him and pay him homage. By contrast the people of Jerusalem are worried and suspicious about the news in spite of the expectations sown by their own prophets. Thus, early on in his account, Matthew lays the foundations for taking the message of salvation in Christ from the Chosen People to the Gentile world.

If T. S. Eliot is to be believed, the Magi had 'a cold coming' and 'a hard time' of it as they made their journey to the see the king of the Jews:

[T]he lack of shelters, and the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly and the villages dirty and charging high prices: a hard time we had of it.

Little has changed. Such exploitation and hostility can be the lot of visitors from foreign lands even today. Our country's response to the refugee crisis resulting from warfare and persecution has been considerably less than generous in the welcome we could have given, even to children. Here, in our parishes, immigrants from Eastern Europe, from Africa and Asia have multiplied in recent years and swelled congregations, but they have not always been met with open arms or welcomed.

The Gospel today teaches us that people from other lands and cultures bring precious gifts with which to honour the Lord. Their enthusiasm and energy, their devotion and commitment can bring a fresh vision and new life to our parish communities.