



St Mark's Church, Reigate

January 2020

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

It's January and the celebrations and festivities of Christmas are over..... or are they? While our televisions and supermarkets would have us believe that Christmas ends on 25 December, the Christmas season in the church really only begins then, and over the coming weeks the readings look at different aspects of the story.

The characters of the Nativity story are familiar, but the Magi (the wise men) are not remembered at Christmas but on a separate festival which falls 12 days after Christmas Day – the Feast of Epiphany. The season of Epiphany then continues until early February, so despite the tree being down and the tinsel being in the loft, January is a perfectly appropriate time to be thinking about these Nativity characters. Not much is known about them, but in Matthew's Gospel they are described as wise men from the East who came to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem bearing gifts for the king.

In the Bible, the three gifts of the Magi are named but nowhere does it actually say there were only three wise men! But over the years, tradition has it that there are three and commonly named as Melchior, Caspar, Balthazar. There have been various things written about them, and very famously T S Eliot wrote a poem called *The Journey of the Magi*, a reflection written from their perspective. The gifts they offered to Jesus weren't random gifts but were deeply symbolic and full of meaning. They offered gold which was associated with kings, showing that Jesus is the king of the world. They brought frankincense which was used in temples, a sign of Jesus' divinity. The last gift was myrrh which was used in burials and was a gift foreshadowing Jesus' death.

As we remember these gifts during the Epiphany season, it is a good opportunity for us to think generally about the idea of gifts. What makes a good gift? We often narrow our understanding of gifts to physical things – things we want or need, or things others want or need. We all have gifts: things which we are good at, talents, traits in our personalities, things that come naturally to us. This might be being a talented sports person; it might be being very good at art or music. It might be that we are someone who encourages others. It may be our kindness, our sense of humour, our organisational skills, our ability to empathise. These are gifts that we have to offer to those around us: our family, our friends, our neighbours. Gifts which can contribute to our communities and help build and strengthen relationships.

This season of Epiphany, I'd like to challenge us all to think about how we can offer our gifts to others, remembering always the greatest gift of love and hope found in the baby whom the Magi visited that very first Epiphany.

With every blessing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mantle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial letter.