**EPIPHANY…..6.1.2019…..Mathew 2.1-12 ASCENSION**

Six centuries before Jesus crushed to despair from decisive defeat, Israelis had been deported as slaves to Babylon. A brilliant captive, Daniel, having survived the lions’ den, was elevated to CEO over other magi masterminds. Magis were astrologer-stargazers who interpreted the king’s dreams, told fortunes and prepared horoscopes.

When released, having endured the long night of exile, generations of exultant Israelis streamed home to despoiled Jerusalem. They left behind the Hebrew Scripture texts, over which the Zoroastrian magi poured.

Six centuries later, when an enormous starry conjunction of planets rose to light up the western skies, as bright as an exploding supernova, learned Persian astrologists (‘aster,’ meaning *star*), remembered the Jewish prophecy of Micah 5 in the Hebrew texts: “You, Bethlehem, are only a small village, yet a ruler of Israel will come from you.” The aristocratic scholarly diviners believed the star portended the birth of a kingly saviour, and undertook an arduous faith-filled four-month journey from afar, compelled by an earnest desire to worship a king.

I know your saintly Sunday School teacher taught you “Star of wonder, star of night, star of royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding.” Lovely thought, but no star can move at the Magi’s travelling pace. And, no star from millions of light years distance, can pinpoint a single Bethlehem stable.

The gift-bearing strangers did not sing “We three kings from Orient are, bearing gifts we travel afar,” for they were not kings, but scientists. In the Eighth Century CE, the Western English monk Bede decided they were three in number, and, four centuries later again, the Eastern Church named them Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

The image of the gifts they bore came from the 10th Century BCE visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. She had brought him gold, as a fitting gift for a king, frankincense for fragrancy in the sacrifices in the Holy of Holies and myrrh for a long life and healing. Later, myrrh became a symbol of anointing the dead. We sang this in our Gradual: Sacred gifts of mystic meaning, frankincense God to disclose, gold, the King of kings proclaiming, myrrh his sepulchre foreshows.”

The wise men from the east were not on top of their quest. At Jerusalem, having taken their eyes off the beckoning star to seek directions of the puppet King Herod, they found they had lumbered into a political minefield. They must have noticed there was no royal bunting, no street bonfires or parties to celebrate the kingly birth around Herod’s palace. At their request for news the birth of the infant King of the Jews, Herod became wolfishly panic-stricken at the thought of losing power to a real King of the Jews.

Herod’s coterie of support-group scribes told the deranged monster Herod where to find the Christ child to visit, not with gifts, but with soldier swords unsheathed.

The keepers of the holy scrolls knew the prophecies, but rejected them; the Gentiles came to find the greatest news in the history of the world. Matthew later gave us Jesus’ explanation “Lord of heaven and earth, you have hidden these things from the wise and have revealed them to infants” [Matt. 11.23].

If Prime Minister Scomo the Magnificent’s lackeys arrived at Ascension to ask us “Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews” what directions would we give? Would we send them up to St. Christopher’s, where there is presently a zoo of white-painted animals actively streaming towards something like action at the church?

Herod was a sociopathic, paranoid Idumean war monger, promoted to the purple by the Roman rottweilers solely for his brutal ability to control. He was an insanely jealous king who would use any vicious means to preserve his tenuous title to his turf. Indeed, he had perverted the title ‘king’ by turning on his own family to kill any likely usurper. By Jesus’ birthdate, he was sick and tottering on his unstable throne.

The news of Jesus, a new kid on his block, a new real King of the Jews, only nine miles away, frightened the daylights out of him. He would meet the Magi’s of a potential rival with blood red slaughter, the only worship he knew.

The magi, who possessed the world’s oldest knowledge, had come 1500 miles to find the light of the world. In place of a throne, they found only a manger. Where they had envisaged grandeur, they were met with poverty. They found a powerless sleeping child, who, one day, would rule the world. They found the King of Kings, the title that will ironically be nailed to his humble throne of the Cross. And, they realized that this was God’s great self-revelation, this was the way God planned to set the universe free.

The wise ones had put commitment to their conviction and feet to their faith. Guided by the light of a star, the Magi would never have found their Saviour had they not moved out. How are we, the Burwood East community travelling by the light of faith? We cannot creep from the stable and remain unchanged yet again until next Christmas comes.

How far out of our present comfort-zone are we prepared to come at the call of the King? How far will we go to make a life-changing personal challenge this new year?

Practically speaking, how can we make asylum seekers more welcome as neighbours, or will we continue to, perhaps, view refugees and people of African appearance with suspicion as a threat to person, to jobs, and property values?

What more can we do for our middle-aged, who still dream of something more to enlighten them in their evening life? How do we respond to our young people, searching for their own star to rise in their life, to guide them to something better? What can we do about our own Chreasters, the Christmas and Easter attendees? They are content to say “I go to Church twice a year. I’m a Christian.” Do they also say “I go to Hungry Jack’s twice a year. I’m a quarter-pounder?”