

Feast of the Epiphany, 6/1/2013, Holy Trinity

Matthew 2:1-12

Today we pass out of the Christmas season where, from Luke, we read the simple story of a humble birth with angels and shepherds and we begin the Epiphany season with Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi to the child Jesus.

So we move from rejoicing at God's coming among us in the Babe Jesus, to reflecting on what it means to us and to the life of the world.

Christmas time is generally regarded as a time for unity.

Many of us know the stories of a temporary cease fire in the trenches of the First World War where opposing soldiers wished one another a Merry Christmas.

It is, also, a time for many families to come together for the celebration.

It is not long, however, before we look around us and at the world and realise that it is still a case of "us" and "them" in its many forms.

Deep ideological differences seem to be more readily acceptable and any compromise is regarded as a sign of weakness.

"We" are the good people. We are the ones who have the right way of thinking and acting.

Anyone who thinks or acts differently to us are the bad people and pose a constant threat to us or at least many seem to think so.

The list of what constitutes "us" versus "them" seems to be endless affecting us in most areas of our lives.

This, however, is not new.

If we look back in biblical history we find that in an account of early Hebrew history, the Hebrew people developed a strong sense of unity against all who were "others" so that they divided the world into "us" and "them".

In other words, it was the people of Israel against all others whom they named "gentiles".

Israel drew a circle around itself.

It saw its particular people as a race specially chosen by God and foreigners, the Gentiles were anathema.

The story of the Magi paying homage to the Christ Child marks the beginning of the new understanding.

This is the story of foreigners, magi, from another world, coming into a truly Jewish environment to pay homage to Jesus and claiming him for all people.

As they came they brought gifts that highlighted the fact that the ultimate gift is that God loves all people, in all places, in all times.

It is the story of a God of all people, a God of unity, a God who moves beyond the trap of “us” against “them”.

This story is critical in the development of our faith of who and what God is.

God is the One who loves all people, in all times and in all places and God challenges us to show God’s love for all people – Jew and gentile, labour and liberal, republican and democrat, Christian and Muslim, rich and poor, brave and cowardly, black and white, male and female, young and old, straight and gay, “us” and “them”.

The magi, coming from the gentile world into Israel to give homage to the Christ child, acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord of Jew and gentile, of you and of me.

And we respond ‘they will know we are Christians by our love, they will know we are Christians by our love.’

No more “us” “them”, knowing that we live under a unifying God who loves all people, in all places and in all times.