

Donnybrook

6 January 2022

Feast of the Epiphany

Welcome

When the Gospel of Matthew was written, two things had already occurred. Firstly, the break with Judaism had taken place, probably ten or fifteen years previously. And secondly, Gentiles had long since been fully welcome into the Christian movement.

Topic

That's the context for understanding the power and purpose of the story of the Magi.

Steps

Matthew makes important links at the beginning and end of his Gospel. In the dream of Joseph, the baby is called "Emmanuel, God-with-us." The last words of the Gospel are: I will be with you always. Just before those last words, Jesus says, Go and make disciples of all nations. This worldwide mission is symbolically anticipated at the birth by the Magi. They stand for the human quest for meaning and purpose, ultimately, the quest for God. All of us, without distinction, are in the story.

At the same time, the Magi are portrayed coming to Jerusalem, seeking guidance from the Jewish Scriptures. This is Matthew's way of affirming: yes, the mission is indeed universal, but the roots of Christianity are firmly embedded in Judaism. An entertaining way of expressing this is attributed to a chief Rabbi of Odessa, who reputedly said: Christianity is Judaism for non-Jews. It is not as odd as it might sound.

Conclusion

The synodal pathway is an invitation to get back to the very core of the Christian Good News – to lay hold of it again, first of all for ourselves, and then to be able to offer it to others. So what are we offering? The central teaching of Judaism is the gift and grace of God – God's unaccountable love for his first chosen people. The central teaching of Christianity is also the gift and grace of God – but this time, God's unaccountable love for all of humanity, every single one of us.