**Matthew 2:1-12**

**We are the Wise Men**

For good or for bad, there are some characters in the Bible that we might relate to: doubting Thomas, hot-headed Peter, the jealous and gossiping disciples or maybe more positive role models such as Naomi or Ruth or even Moses or the Philosopher of Ecclesiastes.

 So many characters in the Bible remind us of our own strengths and weaknesses. And that is no less true in the Christmas story too, of course. As we come into the season of Epiphany now, I want to suggest that we may see ourselves mirrored in the Wise Men.

 So what do I mean by that? Well, there are three ideas I want to briefly pick up on.

**1. Like the wise men, we are lost without God**

Now, we call them wise men but that’s not what the word ‘Magi’ really means. The word ‘Magi’ can mean astrologers or even sorcerers - and they would have been a part of a group of priests flourishing in the Persian Empire.

 But from what we know about these Magi is that they were probably astrologers rather than sorcerers because they knew the stars in the sky so well that they were able to tell when a new one had appeared.

 But sadly, these men were lost without God because they believed in ideas that ran contrary to the Jewish faith and ideas that run contrary to the Christian faith of which we are a part. These men believed that people’s personalities and destinies were governed by star signs and the alignment of stars in the sky.

 We still see this belief today in horoscopes, of course. And we know that many people believe in horoscopes and star signs. But of course, this is incompatible with the Christian faith because as Christians we believe that we are intimately created by God and that it is he who has made us how we are, not some random alignment of stars. And as Christians, we believe that our destiny is intimately held in God’s hands, not in whether or the moon and the sun and Mercury and Venus are moving in one direction or another.

 These Magi were lost in a false system of belief: they were in spiritual darkness.

 Maybe you can remember a time when you too were in spiritual darkness, or perhaps you may feel that you still are…

 We have all started on the spiritual journey from the same place as these Magi: from a place of spiritual darkness.

 But that is not the end of the story for them and it’s not the end of the story for us either… Because like the Magi…

**2. We have been called by God**

The Magi didn’t initiate the journey towards Jesus. It was initiated by God through the star in the sky.

 They saw the sign and they followed it: they could have observed it and discussed it and then gone back to their business but they decided to follow where they were led without really knowing where it was they were heading towards.

 And that is not dissimilar to how it is with each one of us. God calls us, God draws us out of spiritual darkness towards Jesus and we set out on a spiritual journey towards him that lasts the rest of our lives. We don’t initiate it – it is God’s grace that draws us towards him.

 But like the Magi, we need to read the signs for what they are and make a conscious decision to step out on the journey of discipleship.

 I wonder if you can recognize the leading of God in your own life? I wonder if you have a sense today that God is leading you into a future with him?

 If you know the signs are there, then it is up to you to respond to that and step out on the journey. We don’t know where it is going to lead, we don’t know what adventures God has in store for us, but if we sense that God is drawing us to Jesus then we need to respond and follow.

 So the Magi were lost in spiritual darkness but God called them onto a spiritual journey that would lead them to Christ.

**3. The Magi were completely committed to that quest**

We don’t know exactly where the Magi came from but it is likely that their journey took many months and that it was a hazardous and dangerous journey. It wasn’t for the faint-hearted, that’s for sure…

 But such was their commitment, that they were not prepared to turn back as tempting as that would have been for them. The Magi kept going and going and, despite all the odds, their journey led them to the child Jesus, their Saviour.

 We are embarking on a not only a new year, but a new decade too. When we get to the first week of January 2030, I wonder how your decade will have been hallmarked? Will it have been a decade in which you just drifted along in faith and never really drew any closer to Jesus Christ? Or will it be a decade hallmarked by your spiritual growth, your personal transformation; a decade hallmarked by an increased passion as a disciple of Jesus?

 No-one can make that decision for you: it is yours alone to make.

 But here we stand at the beginning of this new decade and there is no better time to make a decision for Christ. There is no better time to decide that this next period of our lives will be devoted to getting to know God better, getting to know Jesus better, and allowing him to transform our lives with his grace, peace and healing.

 In many ways, the Magi act as a mirror for us this morning. Like us, they were lost in spiritual darkness. Like us, they were called by God and drawn to Jesus Christ. Will you be like the Magi and commit yourself to the quest and allow God to completely transform your world?

 That would be a truly beautiful way to enter into, and live through, this coming decade…