

In the 1950s when I lived in Brighton and travelled daily to London on business, the newspaper seller at the railway station used to call out his wares every evening. He was selling newspapers called: "Star, News, Standard and Argus". Actually, he said it all as one word: "Star-news-standard-argus!". It seems remarkable that in those days one had a choice of four evening papers, as most of them have long disappeared. But the names of these four newspapers can sum up for us the message of the Epiphany.

The Epiphany, or the showing forth of Jesus to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, starts with the 'Star'. The wise men said: "We have seen his star in the East". Astronomers and astrologers may try to prove through science and otherwise that about this time a strange star really did shine but, except for it being a useful exercise, they are wasting their time. For if the story is accepted as fact rather than fiction, then there really must have been a star not before seen by them, even if it was not an entirely new one. For these were no ignorant or idle night-watchers; these were 'wise men'. Tradition has it that they had been seeking for many years this bright new star, and it suddenly came. Most of us can believe this story without difficulty for we know that new stars are regularly being discovered in recent years. The first verse of Hymn CP 83 sums up the situation rather neatly for us:

"As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold
As with joy they hailed its light
Leading onwards beaming bright".

The star is then symbolically brought right up to date with the next two lines of the hymn:

"So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to thee".

This star brought 'News' to those wise men of old: news that one was born who was worthy of worship. The second Commandment declared centuries before tells us: "not to make any graven image, you shall not bow down to them or worship them". Yet when we think of the images that many men and women worship today, a long list comes to mind. Such as - the man with his car, on which he lavishes so much care every Sunday morning, polishing and shining it as a status symbol; the woman who becomes a slave of her home, worshipping the front room so much that it is almost treated as holy ground not to be walked upon; those who make a graven image of their job or their club, putting it above all else. Today men and women make anything into graven images from a computer to a new phone, bowing down before them because of the prestige or power it gives them. Though, to keep it in perspective, things were probably no different in Jesus' time, when the new camel or the colourful Bedouin tent took priority. So it really was news to the wise men; that now one was born who was worthy of worship. This is still news' value in our world, because not everyone today recognises him.

This star-guided, news-worthy, child whom they worshipped, set them a new 'Standard'. An old

Eastern legend describes the three Magi as consisting of a youth, a man in middle age, and a man of great age. One by one they separately went into a room to see the Christ and, as each one came out, he described what he had seen. The boy said he had been welcomed by a lad of his own age, who spoke to him of the temptations and ideals of youth. The next Magi told of meeting a man of mature years, who had given him a new hope and vision. The oldest man had found one who was as old as himself, who had given him the sympathy and comfort he needed. Perplexed by the differing accounts, they decided to re-enter the room a second time, this time all together. To their complete surprise they all saw a small child. Of course, as we know, it is the one same Christ who reveals himself in different ways to men and women and children according to their special needs and their capacity for beholding him. In the same way that to a Negro, Jesus appears as a Negro. For the person whom we remember at this time of the year as a baby boy in a manger, sets the standard for young, middle-aged, and old, alike. It is the same standard; to judge each thought, word, action, in our lives by whether we can honestly claim his approval for it.

'Argus' was in Greek mythology, the all-seeing one with eyes in every part of his body. When he was slain by Hermes, those eyes flew off to become the spots of 'beauty' in the peacock's tail. Jesus Christ too is the all-seeing one but, unlike Argus, is also the all-seen one; seen by everyone who looks for and finds the beauty of his revealing of God's love for each of us; scattered around like spots of beauty.

Horatius Bonar links "Star, News, Standard and Argus" for us in the last lines of one of his hymns (No. AMR 351) entitled: "I saw the voice of Jesus say".

"I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him, my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done".

We are encouraged to make those lines our own so that we really can join in that journey of the Magi and see the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles.

But of course, if it is visible for us, then it will shine from us so that others will see the light of God's Son. Philip was such a man. St John's Gospel (12.20) tells of some Gentiles, Greeks, who went to Philip and said: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus". They had obviously picked the right man. There must have been something in Philip's face which shone and attracted the Greeks to him. That is not surprising, for he seems to be the sort who went out of his way to bring people to Jesus. He was a man of Bethsaida, the city where Andrew and Peter also lived. St John (1.43) tells us that Jesus found Philip "and said to him; 'Follow me' ". Philip promptly went and told Nathaniel: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary". Nathaniel was scathing in his response but Philip persisted by saying: "Come and see". There is that marvellous story where an angel of the Lord tells Philip to travel to Gaza. On the way he comes across a minister of the Ethiopian Queen, expounds the meaning of the

scriptures to him, and then baptises him in the river.

So if we truly want an example of one who tried to make the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles come true, we cannot do better than to look at Philip as an example. Accept his example and we too can tell others of the Star in the East which heralded the good News of God, giving us a Standard to live by, and bringing Beauty to those around us.