

Let Christmas linger a little longer please.

Not all the expected guests have arrived, so please hang on before you pack away the stars and the lights as they must guide the way of the holy stragglers to this unlikely place of birth.

The shepherds arrived promptly. They understood about stables and outdoor survival and that a woollen coat would be more than welcome for a newborn king. They were at ease with the cold and the draught into which the saviour of the world was born.

It was all new to the Wise Men however. Theirs was something of a blunderbus approach to the manger. They knew all about palace protocol and ceremony. To leave all that behind in favour of following a star, would indeed have felt like a precarious trusting.

Not only did they end up being at least twelve days late, they also made some ghastly errors.

Assuming a king would be born in a palace they knocked on Herod's door and awoke in him a jealous rage that would have disastrous consequences.

When finally they made it to Bethlehem their gifts were inappropriate. Great clanking offerings of little practical use to a family that would soon find themselves on the run.

They would surely never have met shepherds before nor rubbed shoulders with the rough and ready at a holy birth. I imagine the atmosphere in the stable to have been testy to say the least.

But to any still unsure as to whether this holy birth would touch the lives of people like us, the combined presence of these two groups surely open the way for us to see that we too are being beckoned to enter.

Tomorrow, the shepherds and the wise men will be gone, but Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child will linger for almost another month and they are on the lookout to welcome a third group of visitors.

For if the workaday shepherds and the haphazardly pompous wise men could come within touching distance of each other - and the Christ Child - surely there is a welcome for the likes of you and me, and all those we might like to bring with us by virtue of our prayer.

Epiphany means manifestation. That this is the time of the appearance of God in our lives in his truest of forms. As one of us, whoever we like to make out that we are, as one of us, as He comes so as to love us from the inside, his beating heart at one with the rhythm of ours.

Let Christmas linger for a little while longer. Don't pack away the trappings until you too have come to the stable and knelt in the same straw as these other visitors and made your resolve the same as theirs. To continue on your journey by another way and to do so rejoicing and praising God as never before.

Finally realising what it means that he was born for you.

With much love
Andrew