

A-ha!
Matthew 2:1-12

My son Samuel received a book of cryptic crosswords from his sister for Christmas. Maybe she thought Year 12 didn't stretch his mind enough? Cryptic crosswords certainly do that . . . they're great. The thing with cryptics is that the answer is always somewhere in the clues . . . you just need to know where to look. Take this clue for instance . . . '*Anger about chasing cute adolescent*' (9 letters) . . .

It's amazing how you can look at a clue . . . analyse it . . . ponder it . . . sit and stare at it for what seems like hours . . . and nothing comes . . . you can't make head or tail out of it . . . and you begin to wonder if there really is an answer . . . and, just when you've given up . . . when you've gone away and completely forgotten about it . . . suddenly . . . BING! . . . the light bulb goes on . . . suddenly the answer is there in front of you . . . as clear as daylight . . . and, you go 'A-ha!' . . . that's called an epiphany.

In this case the answer to this clue is 'tweenager' . . . '*anger about chasing cute adolescent*' . . . tweenager . . . so obvious . . . I don't know why I didn't see it immediately . . . 'anger about' means you have to mix up the letters 'anger' . . . so you get 'nager' . . . then, 'chasing' . . . coming after a word meaning 'cute' . . . which is 'twee' . . . put them together and you get the answer which means 'adolescent' . . . hence: 'tweenager'.

Epiphanies are great . . . they just come out of the blue . . . unexpectedly. It might be doing a puzzle . . . or, trying to work out a solution to a problem . . . you wrestle and struggle and nothing comes . . . and, suddenly . . . there it is . . . the answer . . . an epiphany.

Which, of course, is the name given to the event of the magi, who followed the star and travelled from the east to see Jesus . . . Epiphany.

So, what was so surprising – so amazing – about this meeting? What's the 'a-ha!' moment in this story? Why should this be an epiphany . . . a light bulb moment?

Well, the first clue we have is the magi . . . they weren't Jews . . . they were foreigners . . . *goyim* . . . Gentiles . . . which is the Jewish word for anyone who isn't Jewish . . . and what's surprising is these *Gentiles* come to honour . . . to recognise . . . to pay homage to a *Jewish* king.

It wasn't unexpected that such a king should be born . . . the Jewish people had been waiting expectantly for hundreds of years for such a king . . . it was as the prophets had said . . . and he would be the Messiah . . . but, a *Jewish* Messiah . . . for Jews . . . not for Gentiles . . . so, what were these strangers from the east doing riding into town? More importantly . . . what were they doing bowing down to this Messiah?

First light bulb moment! Could this king . . . this Messiah . . . be a king for more than just the people of Israel?

But, notice . . . as wise as these astrologers might be . . . they don't have *all* the answers . . . there's still a cryptic element to this puzzle . . . they might have recognised the star of the Messiah . . . but, where do they go to seek him out? Well, they go to where any intelligent person expecting the coming of the Messiah would go . . . to Jerusalem . . . the city of God . . . where the temple is . . . where the king's palace is . . . where all the important religious people are . . . the chief priests and teachers of the law . . . if they're going to find the Messiah anywhere, surely it will be here . . . amongst royalty . . . amongst the intellectuals . . . amongst the pious.

But . . . no . . . light bulb moment number 2 . . . the Messiah is not born in the place of power . . . in the

place of privilege and wealth . . . he's born in Bethlehem in Judea . . . the least of all the tribes . . . and born in a manger because there was no room in the inn. Could this Messiah be a saviour for more than the rich and powerful . . . the people who have got it all together? Could he be a Messiah for the poor . . . the weak . . . the nobodies . . . the fearful . . . the old . . . the sick . . . the dying . . . the handicapped . . . the marginalised . . . for all the ordinary people with no claim or fame? Could he be *our* Messiah too? For us who doubt . . . and fear . . . and worry . . . could God really be interested in me?

And, perhaps this is the epiphany of Epiphany! The answer is: Yes! God is interested in you . . . in everyone . . . not just Jews, but Gentiles too . . . not just those who've got it together . . . but everyone else as well . . . all of us! And, the proof is in the manger . . . in the baby prophesied by Jewish prophets and recognised and honoured by Gentile astrologers . . . here is Immanuel . . . God for us . . . in the flesh!

And, now the light bulbs should be going on left, right and centre . . . but . . . wait . . . there's one more cryptic clue to uncover . . . one absolutely vital clue . . . because we are not unlike the magi . . . Gentiles, all of us . . . following the star . . . we know of the Messiah's birth . . . we might even know he is *our* Messiah . . . and, yet, we still seem to get it wrong . . . we still get off track . . . we still look for the Messiah in the wrong places . . . and, worst of all . . . we misrepresent the Messiah and what he's about . . . acting more like Herod than the magi. Using our power over others . . . insisting that we have it right . . . putting conditions on faith. The give-aways are statements like: 'God has done this for you, so now you must do this for him . . .', or, '*If* you do this God will bless you' . . . or, 'If you *really* believed you you'd wouldn't live like that . . . '

So, here's the light bulb moment . . . God has given any number of laws and commands and demands to us and expects us to obey . . . but, at this event I hear no commands . . . no demands . . . no expectations . . . no obligations . . . in fact, the only command is the one that comes from the one man of power in the story . . . from Herod . . . otherwise, this is a story of a baby in a manger . . . and the visit of some foreigners from the east who come not out of obligation . . . who come with *joy* to worship him . . . and *then* choose to listen to God rather than Herod's command.

The epiphany of Epiphany again . . . this birth is not about what you should do . . . or could do . . . or must do . . . it's not about your obligations to God, or God's expectations . . . the birth of Jesus is about what God has done for you . . . there is nothing more to do . . . that is the great 'A-ha!' . . . there is nothing more to do. That's the greatest epiphany of all!

Now, if you've ever experienced an epiphany, what's the first thing you do? Pretend nothing's happened? Yawn and get on with life? No . . . no . . . no . . . if you have an epiphany the first thing you do is tell someone . . . you just can't help it . . . "I got it . . . 31 across . . . I worked it out!"

"God is for me . . . Jesus is my Messiah . . . and yours too! It's all done . . . there's nothing more to do."

If life was a cryptic crossword it would definitely include this clue: '*Undeserved competition following end of king*'. And, the answer?

Grace.

There's nothing more to do. That's the epiphany. Now you get to work it out.

Amen.

