

Several different concepts of kingship collide in this gospel passage, not least in the contrast between the kingship of Herod and the kingship of Christ. This is a title Herod has no problem with- he was only too eager to be acclaimed King of the Jews, a title not claimed by Jesus at all, but rather given or accepted from others and in a sense entirely different from that understood by Herod. To understand this difference requires an epiphany, a sudden realisation, a grace, a revelation from without. The Wise Men are open to such promptings: wise to the workings of the Spirit: inspired to travel West in search of a star and a new-born King of the Jews; pointedly more open to this revelation than many of the Jews themselves. Many of the Jews that is, except in the correlative passage in Luke's gospel where the shepherds play the role of the three wise men, also then people on the margins who are less inhibited perhaps by the norms of an increasingly oppressive religion and society. And this indeed is the theme of all of today's readings: that God speaks to and through those on the margins: the poor, the stranger, the outcast. And speaks more readily, it seems, than to those in power: to the rich, to those embedded in the conventions of the day. And with good reason: for the concept of kingship which God espouses is one of service; of an interior poverty, wise to the workings of God, to God's love for the poor – which is all of us in our true state before God. We need such humility, as much today as ever, if we are to tackle the great crises which now face us: the crisis of climate change: of fair distribution of the world's resources and of permitting the world and its peoples a sustainable future. This calls for a conversion of heart and a recognition that it's precisely through the 'poor' that salvation comes to us all. This is not to espouse material poverty for its own sake, to keep the poor, poor, because it's good for them – and us – but to recognise that we are here, in our poverty of spirit, to be gifts for one another, which may include sharing our material riches, too. It certainly includes a recognition that everyone has a gift to offer which is of God. But *receiving* others as 'gift' or bearers of God's gifts, requires the gift of God, too. It is in God's giving, and comes to us in the most surprising and impossible of ways: as a child in a manger, in a country where humanity's divided heart is even now most apparent.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour