

The year was 1970 and the little girl climbed onto her grandmother's bed. She couldn't wait for grandma to open her mahogany jewellery box for grandma had promised the little girl that she could choose one piece of jewellery for herself. She stared wide eyed at all sparkling stones laid out before her on the bedspread. She couldn't decide because there were so many beautiful things. Her grandmother asked her a simple question, "What is your heart's desire?" Not sure how to answer the little girl asked her grandma what her favourite was. Grandma pointed to a very small piano charm which had rubies and sapphires set inside the piano as the keys. The little girl told her she wanted the piano so it would always remind her of grandma.

Almost 40 years later the two of them sat outside a retirement home. Grandma was approaching her 93rd birthday. She was frail but her eyes were the same. The little girl now grown up reminded her of that day. So many years ago, she had made her heart's desire clear. Now she asked grandma what's her heart's desire was. Grandma gazed at her granddaughter and leaned on her walker, "For my children and grandchildren to live fulfilling lives and to make sure the people who are in your lives know you love them." Less than a year later she died but that question lived on, "What is your heart's desire?"

We have come to the beginning of another year and it is timely that we are celebrating the arrival of the wise men. The text doesn't mention how many there are, but they are following their hearts' desire. Their longing is to find the Saviour, the Christ of all the world.

Those of us that went to Sunday School remember the meaning of the gifts. The gold is for a king, the frankincense for a priest to burn at worship and the myrrh is for preparation of his body for death. Strange gifts indeed. These strange figures from the east represent the deep desire of the Gentile world (the non-Jewish world) to come and greet the newborn king.

It is easy to dismiss this story but from the other end there are Iranian traditions of star gazers who followed a planetary conjunction in 7BC and a comet in 5BC. It starts to do your head in that Jesus might have been born 5 years BC, or 5 years ahead of himself. In any case we see the result of finding their deepest desire in verse 10: "They were overwhelmed by joy."

As we come to this new year what is your deepest desire?

St Ignatius lived in the 15th century. He began as a knight fighting for his family's castle but was badly injured in the leg by a cannon ball. As he lay in the castle recovering from his injuries, he wasn't especially religious, but he was bored. He discovered only two books in his room. One was a tale of knights winning fair maidens, a sort of 15th

century Mills and Boon, and the other was lives of the saints. He began to pay attention to his mood swings. When he read the lives of the saints, he slowly found himself wanting more and more to be like them and less and less like the knights of his romance book. To cut a long story short he wrote a hugely influential spiritual book which is widely used today. In his spiritual exercises he invites each of us to ask ourselves the question: "What is my heart's desire?" And then to bring that desire to Jesus. Time and time again, it is the experience of the people of God that they are overwhelmed by joy because God wants to honour the deep desire of our hearts.

So, what are my deep desires for this community of faith in this year of 2020? I want to see the church restored. I desire this to be an inclusive community with the preschool continuing to thrive and us making greater links with Petersgate. I desire that we continue to be a caring community serving our neighbour. But the more I dwell on these desires the more I begin to realize that underpinning them is my longing that people will be drawn closer and closer to Jesus. Churches and counselling centres and preschools are great, and we wouldn't be without them, but isn't the point of it all to be growing into a more intimate and personal relationship with our living Saviour? That's my desire in doing what I do; that we might come to a closer relationship with Jesus. I wonder what yours is.

Are you like St Ignatius and those wise sages of old seeking a closer and more meaningful relationship with Jesus this New Year?

A modern historian, like those sages of old, sought to find the central figure in all of history. Arnold Toynbee wrote a massive tome entitled A Study of History. His conclusion is worth quoting: "When we set out on this quest, we found ourselves moving in the midst of a mighty host, but as we pressed forward, the marches, company by company have all fallen out of the race, and now we stand and gaze with our eyes on the farther shore, as a single figure raises from the flood and straightaway fills the whole horizon."

As we come to this new year, many jewels of great price are laid out before us. But let's ask ourselves what is our heart's desire, and let's have the courage to bring our desire to the stable, for there we will find, as countless have before us, Jesus Christ, the pearl of great price who alone stands to bring us overwhelming joy.

*Let us pray:*

*Living God, we have come to a new year and we thank you.  
We bring to you our heart's desire -  
To know you more clearly, love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly day by day.*

*In Christ's name we pray. Amen*