

Epiphany 2010

Isaiah 60: 1-6; Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3: 1-12; Matt 2: 1-12

Isaiah: Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Today we are celebrating the Day of Epiphany, although Epiphany is officially on 6 Jan, we are celebrating it today, on the nearest Sunday. Sometimes we speak of having an epiphany, meaning, to have a revelation, to suddenly realise the truth of something we had not known before. Epiphany (Gk) means essential truth. This is *THE* epiphany: the bringing of the gospel to the gentiles, to you and I!

This is also the 2nd Sunday of Christmas. So as we worship this morning, we are reminded of both the birth of Jesus and the fact that Jesus came, not only to the Jews, but to all people.

Matthew 2: The way that the birth of Jesus is announced in Matthew's gospel is by the telling of the coming of the star and the wise men following it to find the new born babe, born in Bethlehem. The wise men came from the east (it is uncertain as to where they came from, but it was a long journey). They were asking "Where is the child who was born king of the Jews?" These wise men, believed to be astronomers, had observed a star rising and realised the significance of this star.

We understand the wise men to be gentiles, not Jews, and this is significant, as Jesus was sent first to the Jews, but also to the gentiles. So these wise men, who were not Jews, came bearing gifts, to worship and pay homage to the new born king. The prophets had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, at this time.

Note that in this reading from Matthew we are told that King Herod wanted to know where the babe was so he too could worship him, however, the wise men were told in a dream not to return to tell Herod, but to go home by another way. In the passage following the one read this morning, Herod seeks to have the baby Jesus killed when he has all the boys of two years of age and under killed. But again God intervened and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, warned in a dream, took the baby Jesus and fled to Egypt. In this reading Matthew clearly shows that God's purpose is to be carried through, against human opposition.

This baby Jesus was born to be king of all people, not simply king of the Jews.

This baby Jesus was Son of God.

Let us now look at some of the implications of his coming to all people, looking beyond the Jews, to all of humanity.

We turn now to Paul's letter to the people of Ephesus.

Ephesians 3:6 Here it says that the gentiles have become fellow heirs! Members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. The Messiah expected by the Jews has come to Gentiles also.

Paul says although he is the least of all the saints, by the grace of God he was given the ministry to bring the gentiles the good news. Here Paul is referring to his conversion to follow Jesus Christ. Paul had actively persecuted all who followed Jesus, until he was convicted by God of the truth of Jesus Christ.

Thus it was by grace, not Paul's own will that he was given this ministry to fulfil. It is by grace that all ministry comes.

If we seek to do ministry in our own strength and by our own will, we will fail. Paul starts this chapter by saying: "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles." Paul was apparently under house arrest at that time because of his beliefs and religious practices. But essentially, he was a prisoner for the gospel of Christ.

What is the nature of this gospel, that Paul says had been hidden in mystery in earlier times? Paul says what was not known in earlier generations, has now been made known by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Paul's task was to:

"bring the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This is in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.”

Paul set in place the beginnings of the spread of the Word, the good news, to all peoples, regardless of race or ethnicity.

It is because of Jesus being sent to all humanity that we are now part of this promise to all. This presents a wonderful gift for us, to be God’s adopted children; to be called Christians. It also brings responsibility for how we live our lives.

Paul set out with evangelist zeal to spread the good news of Jesus Christ among all peoples. Today in our comfortable Australian society, there are, in each generation, increasing numbers of people who do not know Jesus, or perhaps even worse, who have some mythical view of who he is and completely miss his wondrous gift of love to all of humanity.

Would we deny knowledge of this to those around us? We are often coy about sharing the good news of Jesus, we bend over backwards not to cause offence to others, and in the process, we keep this good news to ourselves.

I see this as a great challenge for us, that is particularly relevant at the season of epiphany. How do all these people around us, get to know and love Jesus, if no-one tells them? In a society that pushes the autonomy of human beings, complete and sufficient in our own selves, with an arrogance that needs no other.

How can we share our faith without being offensive, or condescending, or being seen to push something that is no longer of relevance to humanity? Indeed, God’s love for us has never been more relevant. We need it and the whole world needs it!

May I suggest that this begins with our personal relationship with God through Christ, and it is then that we may reach out in his love to others. I also want to caution, that we may spend the rest of our lives getting ready, growing in our faith, before feeling that we are ready to begin reaching out to anyone else. It requires us to be willing to be vulnerable, to let go of our fears and allow the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, words and deeds. Whatever we do, we must do it in the love of our God.

I want to finish this morning with a prayer that Paul prayed for the people of Ephesus; that can be our prayer too. (Ephesians 3:17b-19)

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever.”

Amen.