

## God calling - Epiphany 2

*Isaiah 49:1–7; Psalm 40:1–14; 1 Cor. 1:1–9; John 1:29–42*

We are in the season of the Epiphany. As a young person this always seemed such a mysterious and intriguing piece of church terminology. A church in the nearby Adelaide Hills was called the Church of the Epiphany, and I must admit that I was somewhat jealous of their “really cool” name. Where I worshipped at the time we were just plain old St Margaret’s.

I now know that Epiphany comes from the Greek term *epiphaneia* and that it merely means a showing or revealing – nothing mysterious about it at all.

However, it is an amazing and almost incredible fact that our God, the creator of the cosmos, the Ancient of Days, the Alpha and the Omega, desires to reveal himself to each one of us. He calls to each of us, and that call is very much the theme of the readings for this Sunday.

In the reading from Isaiah Chapter 49, a servant is called to do God’s will. The servant is the prophet Isaiah and perhaps Israel itself is also indicated. Christians see a foreshadowing of Christ in these passages. Isaiah says (Is. 49:1b) *The Lord called Me from the womb; , from the body of My mother he named Me.* Isaiah has a strong sense of the task God is calling him to saying (Is. 49:2-3) *He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand He has concealed me; And He has also made me a select arrow, He has hidden me in His quiver. He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory.”*

Like so many of the patriarchs and prophets whom God called, Isaiah feels unworthy and that his labour is in vain. But God repeats or perhaps confirms the call, promising him that he will do even greater works. Not only will he bring Jacob and Israel back to God, but he will be given as a light to the nations so that God’s

salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:5, 6). Both Isaiah, through his writings, and Israel through Jesus the Messiah accomplished this task.

Paul writing to the church at Corinth speaks of his call as an apostle – *Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God* (1Cor. 1:1). He reminds his readers or hearers that they are also called, addressing them as *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.* (1Cor. 1:2).

Called to be saints does not mean that the Corinthians were especially pious or holy. Read on, and you will discover that they most definitely were not! But it means that they, like us, and like countless followers of Jesus throughout the world, are called by God and set apart for something special. Just as under the old covenant God called special people (and a special nation Israel) and set them apart for His work, now in the new covenant all people and all nations are called by God and invited into His family.

The gospel reading continues the theme. John the Baptist, seeing Jesus coming towards him, calls out “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Some of John’s disciples are inspired to learn more about this man whom John calls “the Lamb of God”. Jesus calls them to “come, and you will see”, and they in turn call others.

Something quite new is happening here. A little later in John’s gospel we read that John says of Jesus *He must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30). Apart from revealing John’s prophetic insight and his profound humility, this marks the passing of the old dispensation and the coming of something completely new. So new, in fact, that Paul writing in his second letter to the Corinthians is moved to declare that we are a new creation, all the old things have passed away, new things have come, and that all of these things are of God (2 Cor. 5:17-18).

God, in Christ, is calling a new people into being. These new people (and that includes us) enjoy a vastly different relationship with God from those who went before the coming of Jesus. God lives in us, abiding and dwelling within! God speaks to us, each and everyone of us, letting us know His will and move in His power. We have access to God's very throne through Jesus. (Hebrews 4:16). We are raised and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). We are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, ... called out of darkness into His marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9).

What will be the hallmarks of this new creation? In other words, what will be the things that we seek to show forth, individually and together as God's people in 2011?

Today's readings give us clues for this new lifestyle for new people:

*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29). We are people who know, firmly and without a shadow of doubt that we are saved. Jesus did it all on the cross, and we do not have to strive to earn our salvation in our own strength. We are delivered. We are set free!

*I thank my God always* says Paul (1Cor. 1:4a). We are people of thanksgiving, for what Jesus has done and for all the benefits our God has bestowed upon us.

*He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the Lord* (Psalm 40:3). Above all, our lifestyle is to be one of worship and intimacy with our God. It is shown in a deep joy and rejoicing.

*I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart* (Psalm 40:8). Sacrifices and offerings are not, in themselves

enough, they need to be preceded by an open ear and willing obedience. In our lifestyle the scriptures are honoured. They are always on our lips and in our hearts.

*I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (Is. 49:6b) and from John's gospel: Andrew brought Simon to Jesus (John 1:42a). We testify that as we are called and named by God, so His love and salvation are for everyone.

I believe that if we cultivate a lifestyle of praise and worship, of trust, thanksgiving, and rejoicing, and a love of and commitment to the Word, we will move forward no matter what the circumstances. We will be like a runaway train!

Do not worry that we are all getting old – Abraham was old, older than most of us!

Do not worry that we are few – Gideon had his army's numbers reduced by God before a mighty victory!

Do not worry about the dozens of "what ifs" – the only "if" that counts is *If God is for us, who is against us?* (Romans 8:31b)

God is calling, let's respond!

The Lord be with you.