

Sermon: Epiphany 2020

Epiphany is about Revelation – for Christians it is about the revelation of who Jesus is and how God manifests through Jesus into the world – Jesus is the Epiphany of God’s love.

But of course, along with this revelation and acknowledgment by people of Jesus as the Messiah – the anointed - one foretold by prophets who would come to be a light of peace and justice in an oppressed and dark world – there will be the Herods – those who would be none too pleased to hear of such a thing – those who whose power and control and self-seeking would be threatened.

And even today – when you mention the possibility of there being something good and worthwhile in following Jesus in faith and trust – there are the 21st century Herods who are absolutely closed to any of it. Why is that?

Perhaps it is still about power and control – but not so much the threat of losing power and control over a nation or group – but losing power and control over our own lives – perhaps it is about the fear of having to handing over their wills and lives to a yet unknown presence - to not be ‘in control’ but having to find security in not what is seen but what is unseen before being experienced.

Insecurity does just that – it makes us latch on to tangible things we can control and dominate – things that help to make us feel more important than we really are – to validate ourselves and to convince ourselves that we really are worthwhile when in actual fact, we don’t feel worthwhile at all...

Those of us who have cause for doubting whether we are ever good enough to be loved, but who have caught just a glimpse of what it means to be loved by God for who we are – and who have turned things around to become followers of the faith and Good News of Jesus – have a challenge on our hands at Epiphany...

Because we believe Jesus to be the pathfinder to that unconditional love and promise of eternal life that is so for all God’s people when they turn to it and seek it – and because we know that it was what had been missing from our lives for so long - Epiphany really is a challenge because we are called to bear witness to that Good News and to be a manifestation of God’s love for the world.

As Christians we are called to reveal that love by living it out in the example of Jesus.

That’s why we say here at St Peter’s that we live out our faith in our community by holding Jesus at the centre and offering in Christ’s name a warm welcome, faithful witness and loving service.

We don’t know much about the characteristics of the Wise Men – some say they came on ships – we say there were three because three gifts were recorded – they were even given names in the third century of Melkon, Balthasar and Caspar – we are told Jesus was by now a toddler and not the baby in a manger...

But whatever the facts and figures, Matthew is using this story for a dramatic unfolding of what he is trying to say – the world is being called to witness the most dramatic event – ‘Love coming down at Christmas’ – heavens declaring the glory of God.

But there is also something else to be said - this is an inclusive God – a God of oneness for one and all...

Just as the subtle genealogy of Jesus lineage reveals women with poor reputations as part of his family – just as the first people to see the Christ Child – the shepherds - are the lowest of lows of society - so too does the story of the Wise Men – non Jewish men – say something in its

revelation that homage of the highest order is being paid by a wider circle than 'God's so-called chosen'

Actually, this drama is saying that God's chosen is anyone and everyone who joins in to be part of this glorious story of redeeming and saving grace.

The revelation here is the fact that we are ALL chosen ones – God's beloved children – but whether we actually experience that privilege and joy is another matter...

This Magi Story speaks to us today of the adventure of courage and conviction through the actions of those wise men. They followed a star pointing to a place they knew not where – pointing to a king they knew not of. All they knew is that they felt compelled to go with their instinct that the time had come, and follow the signs and seek out something they had been waiting for – but not really knowing what it truly was that they had been waiting for – until they found it...

We will be singing a hymn later today that puts to music the beautiful words of Christina Rossetti:
Love came down at Christmas
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Amen

Jacqueline Drake-Smith, Epiphany 2020