

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Epiphany(Year B)

Isaiah 60:1-6    Psalm 72:1-15    Ephesians 3:1-12    **Matthew 2:1-12**

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

In our tradition we travel through familiar stories each year with the turning of our Christian seasons. We have welcomed the Christ child at Christmas, marvelling at the wonder of “the Word was made flesh and lived among us” and now as we move into the Epiphany season we are offered a series of stories which reveal what that means for us. Today we begin with the much loved story of the arrival of the Magi, representatives of the nations of the world, traditionally shown as representatives of people of different ages, the first pilgrims to make a long journey to discover the Christ in circumstances very different from what they might have expected.

As our familiar carols tell and all the teaching you might have heard through childhood and beyond explore, this story is packed with symbolism and significance – Jesus the King of the Jews not found in the palace, the wise ones from the nations recognising him, foretelling that he is here for the whole world not just his own nation, and of course, the gifts symbolising his identity and path to come.

Just as the wise ones open their treasure chests, so too though, does the yearly re-visiting of a story enable it to open to us anew, as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in reading, speaking and listening so that the gifts God has for us are revealed for today.

What holds my attention in this story is an apparently insignificant phrase in its midst:

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.

Firstly I noticed it, because this year this has a particular poignancy, that it would have been difficult to even imagine in times past. Until what we have been living through in our past year, and return to now, "on entering the house" is just as descriptive phrase, now we might not take that for granted. These wise ones who had travelled across nations and from the main city of the nation are able to go into the house without a second thought, probably to the surprise of those inside, and with a sense of awe at the stopping of the star – but without concern about bringing in anything other than their gifts.

Noticing this made me wonder at just how what we are living through makes us see things in new ways – perhaps appreciating what blesses our lives more fully and recognising some of the things we once thought were basic in our life, like inviting a guest in over the threshold are to be treasured when the opportunities return. As we move into another period of physical distancing, thinking about other ways to "visit" one another and "welcome" one another continues to be important: patterns of phone calls, zoom and the like if it is for you, and letter writing might be things to cherish with renewed value.

And as I stayed with this phrase, a new sense of its gift for this time arose.

As we imagine the story of the visit of the wise ones we have sweeping vistas of their journey and the wide night sky with its star; we have the splendour and power of Herod's court; and then we have the destination, the place where Jesus is found, the place of deep worship: all that happens "in the house"

It seems those familiar lines that we hear over Christmas from John's gospel: "the Word was made flesh and lived among us"

mean what they say. After his birth in an animal pen, the first place the worship of Christ spread was to the house, the home.

The first place for worship Christ is the home. Perhaps it is a gift of this time opening to us now, to rediscover our homes as places of worship and the place Jesus dwells with us, blessing all that we are and do.

There is an Epiphany tradition which emphasises this: the chalking of a message above the door of your home to mark the year and three initial letters interwoven with the sign of Christ- the cross:

20 + C + M+ B+ 21

The letters have two hidden meanings.

The legendary names of the Magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar

And a Latin phrase **ChristusMansionemBenedicat** which means **May Christ bless this house**

Traditionally chalk is blessed for this use in church on the feast of Epiphany but members of a household can pray a blessing on their own home as they mark it, for example:

Lord God of heaven and earth, you revealed your only begotten Son to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who live here and all who visit in time to come. May we be blessed with health, kindness of heart, gentleness and love for you.

Fill us with the light of Christ, that our love for each other may go out to all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

It seems to me that this year is a particularly good year to join in with this tradition. Most of us will be spending a lot of time at home, so recognising that our home is a sacred place of God's presence where, just like the wise ones entering a house, we can find Jesus' companionship and offer our worship, opening all that we treasure to share with him, is really timely.

I wonder if, at home, you can walk around the place where you live and notice where you feel close to God, where prayer feels easy. What might prompt you to worship or praise God at home, to give thanks or raise to God your concerns? Can you make it your epiphany journey this year to find unexpected places to meet Jesus not far away in a distant nation, but close to home, in your own house?

If you have some chalk, maybe you can chalk the blessing at your door, but you might like to use the sheet I have added to my mail out and place it somewhere that you use for prayer at home, that you see regularly. Or if you feel creative, to make a similar version for yourself. A religious community who make this blessing every year have added new prayers to meet the particular experience of this Epiphany-tide which we might want to add to our blessing prayers and which I use now as a blessing on all our homes through the coming weeks:

May the peace of Christ be with all who enter this house. Watch over and protect our families and loved ones in these difficult times of the pandemic. Keep us free from sickness and danger and restore to health those have contacted the virus. May we be signs of your healing presence to one another as we welcome you, Saviour of us all, into our hearts and homes.

May the love of Christ, bring hope to all whose lives have been compromised in any way by the pandemic, especially the unemployed, the homeless, the poor and those whose lives are in danger. Keep us safe from all that might harm us in any way and fill us with a deep and abiding trust in your loving presence.

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen