

Epiphany Sunday 2020

John 1:10-18

Epiphany, revelation, sudden understanding, a light bulb moment. Specifically, theologically speaking, the revelation to gentiles, represented by magi, or wise men from the east, of the coming in to the world of Jesus. I wonder what exactly they made of what they saw and experienced. How much did they understand? They knew that He was a king, that much we know. But did they know what kind of king? Did they understand that God Himself had been born in to His very own creation in order to bring light and life and ultimately to save it through His own death and resurrection? I don't think they understood all of that at all. But when they saw where the star had led them their hearts were filled with joy, and when they saw Him they fell to their knees and worshipped. The first gift they gave Him was their worship and adoration. It reminds me of that moment when Elisabeth sees the pregnant Mary and her child John leaps inside of her in recognition. Many people, including many of us saw Jesus and something inside of us instantly recognised something about Him.

John tells us that Jesus came in to the world that was His, the world that He had spoken in to being and the very people He had created did not receive Him, but, those who did receive Him, He gives to them, to us the right to become children of God. We have received grace and truth from Him and He has made God the Father known to us. The whole of John's gospel flows from this beginning, it is all about the revelation, the realisation, the epiphany of exactly who Jesus is, of why He came and of what our response should be.

There are two quite different things that I want to say about Epiphany this morning. The first is that for some people they have one really amazing mind blowing epiphany when they fully realise who Jesus is, bow down and worship Him and give themselves fully to Him for the rest of their lives, but even these people will experience further revelations and epiphanies. However for many, if not most of us, coming to that full realisation of who Jesus is and the implications of what that realisation means for ourselves and for the world comes about in a series of epiphanies. Some greater, some smaller. And for many of us, we will continue to experience these moments of greater revelation and sometimes because we have to be reminded, re-revelation throughout our lives. In our relationship with Jesus, most of us if we desire to grow in faith and deepen our relationship with God will recognise this. And we are in good company. Even John the Baptist who recognised Jesus in the womb, who pointed Him out to others in the desert, who felt unworthy to baptise Him, still sent word from prison to ask if He

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really was the Messiah. The disciples certainly did not fully understand who Jesus really was at the very least until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on them in power, and even

then there were further revelations, new epiphanies. I can't remember now who first suggested to me that when I experience these rare and precious, sometimes life changing moments, I should think of them as stakes in the ground, markers along the path of my journey of faith, I find it a helpful image.

Once we were among those of whom John said that Jesus had come to us but we did not receive Him. Now we know enough to believe in His name and He has given us the right to become spiritual children of God. Wherever we are in terms of the ongoing revelation of who He is (and we will not fully understand until we see Him face to face), we are saved and adopted into the family of God. Alleluia!

The wise men brought with them gifts to lay before the King, Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. And we too have gifts to lay before King Jesus, gifts that He Himself has given us, both natural and supernatural and we must lay them before Him. But giving Jesus the gifts was not the first thing the wise men did. When they realised they were in the presence of their King, their hearts were filled with joy and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Our first offering must always be one of praise and worship, it will always be the most important gift we give Him. To worship Him is to acknowledge who He is and who we are in relation to Him. It both humbles and exalts us in the most extraordinary way, it is not an experience that can easily be described in words. And then we offer Him the gifts we have, and we offer them unconditionally, to be used or not according to His will, so that whatever we do or do not do there should be no pride in it. Our only boast, as St Paul reminds us, is in Jesus, in His life, death and resurrection. The gifts we offer Him, as I have said, are those which He Himself has given us and having offered them back to Him we should use them only for His Glory and His Kingdom. Methodists all over the world will have used their covenant prayer on New Year's Day.

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

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let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

We are beginning a New Year that is full of uncertainty, but we are people of hope. In tier 4 we are pretty much locked down in our homes, but we live in the eternity of the presence of the living God. The wise men had to hurry away, back to their own lands, but there is no limit to the time that we may spend worshipping our King. In fact this gift of time that some of us have been given might just be a gift to be used spending more time worshipping and less time doing. Many of us are Marthas by nature but Mary made the better choice, to sit at Jesus feet and listen. The world so desperately needs the hope, the wisdom, the peace, the restoration, the salvation that only we can offer through faith in Jesus, and the world mostly, desperately does not want to hear it. So we must spend more time fulfilling our first calling, which is to worship so that we might better fulfil our second calling which is to reveal to others what has been revealed to us so that they too may experience Epiphany. This poem popped up in several places for me in the last week or so, and Liz from St Mary's also sent it to me. I am going to share it with you because it is important:

The work of Christmas

When the song of the Angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky has gone,

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**When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.**

Howard Thurman

Remember though, this is His work and we can only join Him in it after we have been in the place of the wise men, after we have received revelation of who Jesus is and we have worshipped the King with adoration and laid down our gifts before Him.

Amen