

## *The Light at the heart of everything*

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
The Epiphany of Our Lord — Sunday 4 January 2015  
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*Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12*

What is an epiphany? We sometimes talk of having epiphanies when we see something clearly for the first time. It is revealed to us. The Feast of Epiphany—the story of wise men from the East searching out and finding the Christ Child—is about this showing, this revealing of something. In this story it is both a revealing of a new revelation but also the revelation is light itself—that which illuminates. Divine light shines forth from this Child. The divine light that shines in the Child is not a foreign light to the earth. It is the Light at the heart of all life. It is the Light from which all things come. If somehow this Light were extracted from the universe, everything would cease to exist. So this is a story about the Light at the heart of everything, the Light at the heart of you, the Light at the heart of me.

Look around you now at the people next to you, at the life forms growing from the earth, at the radiance of the sun or the whiteness of the moon. And look also into your own heart. There in all things is the Light. Maybe it is deeply hidden under confusions or falsities. But it is there, waiting to come forth anew. In the Christ Child this Light shines. He is our epiphany, our showing. In him we see the Light of life.

Jewish sages speak about the story of the burning bush in the Book of Exodus, in which Moses sees a bush on fire, but the bush is not consumed. The sages say that the important thing about this story is not that the bush is burning but that Moses notices, because every bush is burning, every bush is on fire with the divine presence, everything in the universe shines because God is at the heart of it. So it is in our epiphany story. It is a story that invites us to open our eyes to the light that is everywhere.

There are three things that particularly strike me in our reading. The first is that it is a story about following stars and paying attention to dreams. This is not usually how we in the western world discern paths is it? The second thing is that this is a story about finding light way beyond the boundaries of what is familiar to us, beyond the boundaries of our nation, beyond the boundaries of our religion. This is challenging, is it not, to those who think that their culture, their religion and way of life have all the answers? And the third thing is that this is a story about enormous risk, because the Light that the wise men find is a threat to the political power of the day. That would make sense wouldn't it—that the story of Jesus, if anyone is paying attention, is very disturbing to those who belong to the world's most politically powerful nations?

Let's look at that first feature of the story, the following of stars and dreams. In the Celtic world there is the practice of what is called reading from the two books of God—the big book and the little book. The big book refers to the universe, to the creatures, to everything that has been spoken into being. 'In the beginning was the Word,' says St John, and all things have come into being through the Word. Or in the beginning was the Sound, as some other teachers put it, and the Sound was with God and the Sound was God. Everything is essentially a sounding of God. The universe is like a sacred vibration, a living text that we can learn to read. And that includes the movement of the stars, the flowing of the seasons, the dreams of the night.

But there is also the little book, physically little, the book of Scripture in which we listen for God speaking to us through those who have gone before, our mothers and fathers in the faith. Their experiences of God, their mistakes and failings, as well as their hopes and wisdom are

given to us so that we too can learn the way in which God speaks in the human heart and in human history.

And what we are invited to do is listen to these two books in stereo, to the big book and the little book. If we listen only to the little book (Scripture) and ignore the big book (Creation), we may miss the vastness of the utterance, God in all things. And if we listen only to the big book (the expression of God in the universe) and ignore the little book (the word of God in scripture), we may miss the intimacy of the voice, God speaking in the secret places of the human heart. The challenge is to listen in both books, and not just individually but in community, faithfully wrestling together to more deeply know the Sound of God and to resound with God, to re-sound God in our lives and relationships.

And what about the second feature of the story, the wise men going beyond the boundaries of their homeland to find Light? Tragically we have often been given the impression that we have all the light we need, within our nation, within our religious tradition, within our cultural inheritance. But our Gospel story points to something radically different, that there is Light beyond our inherited boundaries, and that we need this Light, that it is given to complete the Light we have received, not to compete with the Light we have received. We need one another as nations and religions as much as the species of the Earth need one another to be whole.

Bede Griffiths is one of my favourite spiritual writers. He was an English Benedictine monk who lived most of his life in India. In the East, in the wisdom and meditative practices of Hinduism, he found what he called 'the other half of his soul.' Like the wise men, he needed to go beyond the boundaries of his homeland, beyond the boundaries of his inherited tradition, in order to see more deeply, more truly.

We are truly blessed in our modern day and age to have the wisdom and knowledge of so many traditions available so we can explore and discover light beyond our shores. The trick is not to abandon our own tradition, for it too, deeply contains the light.

Perhaps its greatest light is the story of God's love for all humanity and all creation. In Jesus we have the revelation of this love. It is the '*caritas* meta-narrative'. This is the story we tell over and over again at Christmas, that 'love came down Christmas' (Hymn 317). Perhaps a question to ask this Epiphany is, 'Do you know that you are loved? Do you know it in the heart of your being?' This is the truth of Epiphany, that you are loved, that you are part of this beautiful Light of God, that you too are called to shine for the healing of the world.

And this leads to the third feature of our story, that it is about risk, enormous risk. The Light that the wise men find is a threat to the most powerful man in Judea, because the Light that the wise men find is the Light at the heart of all life, not just of some life, not just of certain people. Any power structure that favours only some rather than serving all, all people, all life, is a false power. It has no ultimate future. It will collapse. And at some level false power knows this. It always feels threatened by the shining of true Power, the power of love. 'Love-Force,' as Mahatma Gandhi called it, 'Not Brute-Force.'

We don't know what happened to the wise men. But my sense is that they would never have regretted the risk they took, they would never have regretted crossing the boundaries of their homeland, they would never have regretted following a star.

Mary Oliver, the Pulitzer Prize winning poet, in 'Six Recognitions of our Lord' writes of such a moment. 'Then,' she says, 'I go back to ... my own house, my own life, which has now become brighter and simpler, somewhere I have never been before.' I think the wise men in returning home saw everything more brightly. The Light they had found in a distant land turned out to be the Light at the heart of their own land. But now they saw it as if for the first

time. Shall we this year serve this Light together? Shall we bow to it in one another and every nation? It is the Light within all life.

And so...

May the angels of light glisten for us this day.

May the sparks of God's beauty dance in the eyes of those we love.

May the universe be on fire with presents for us this day.

May the new sun's rising grace us with gratitude.

Let earth's greenness shine and its waters writhe with spirit.

Let heaven's wind stir the soil of our soul and fresh awakenings arise within us.

May the mighty angels of light glisten in all things this day.

May they summon us to reverence.

May they call us to life. Amen.