

The Anglican Church of St Philip's O'Connor, Canberra, ACT, Australia  
Services on Sunday: Holy Communion 8am and 10am. Wednesday 10am

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## **23rd January 2005. Third Sunday after Epiphany**

### **Rob Lamerton**

Readings:

- Isaiah 9: 1-4
- Psalm 27: 1-10
- 1Corinthians 1: 10-18
- Matthew 4: 12-25

"What are you looking for?"

Last week, Chris painted a picture of Jesus (with a little help from St John's gospel) looking at us and asking "What are you looking for?" — inviting exploration to discover, to follow, to come with him on a journey.

Often we are asked, "What are you looking for?" when shopping for a [Christmas] gift, or an item of clothing — my answer is "I'm not sure, but when I find it I will let you know."

At Epiphany we are presented with what we are looking for in bits and pieces — and we are asked to put the pieces together — to travel the road — to take the journey of discovery.

Epiphany began with the story of the Wise Men — Magi, astrologers, philosophers, embarking on their journey to see where the star led and to uncover a child — Jesus.

Then the journey of Epiphany continued with Jesus at his baptism — the unfolding of his ministry — beginning with the discovery of who he is and the discovery of who he is in relationship with God.

Hopefully our own baptism is a beginning of an unfolding of who we are — and our relationship with God.

Then last week the Epiphany story asked "Who are you looking for on the journey" and the likelihood that there is *NOT* a clear answer.

If we know what we are looking for, the journey would be very different — straight from A to B.

I suppose that would be like a missile locked onto its target unable to be redirected and the question then arises:

How can we be open to discovery if we are so "locked on" to the target.

Maybe this whole Epiphany journey is a reflection of the epiphanies — the bright moments of discovery in our lives and more so a journey of those epiphanies, those bright moments of discovery of grace in the unfolding journey of our faith.

It is necessary to have goals and objectives!

Any student knows the importance of keeping one's eye on the coursework and the study and exams and on what can be achieved; to graduate with some skills for the path ahead.

But there are also rewards if we are free enough to move beyond the framework of our lives.

There is something of this in the gospel today.

The familiar message of John the Baptist is now silenced. His face no longer seen among the friends of Jesus.

He is in prison! —

And so, Jesus withdraws to Galilee, leaving home, he makes his way to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. He moves away from the familiar and life becomes somewhat uncertain outside Judean territory — in **Galilee of the Gentiles** and the verse about the people sitting in darkness which applied to the Jews in Isaiah's writing is now applied beyond their borders to the nations. (the gentiles)

## Light Dawns

Repentance is preached among the Gentiles (Nations), James and John, gentiles and fisherfolk are called to follow and teaching, proclaiming the good news, and healing follow — in Galilee.

Now Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospels and its material is concerned with the Jews or with the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. (As with the quote from Isaiah today.) This gospel refers to Jesus as the descendant of David and his place as the Messiah of the Jews.

**But**, Jesus also moves from Jewish territory to areas beyond and back again, indicating that this Jewish Messiah has a message of universal importance.

A Jewish birth is followed by a visit by those foreigners — the gentile, Wise Men from the East. They came from a strange land of strange religion and represent the world beyond coming to know the Messiah.

Jesus is then moved to Egypt and back (recalling Moses). He is settled in Nazareth and baptised in the river Jordan (very Jewish) before testing his call in the wilderness.

Today we hear how with the imprisonment of John the Baptist, Jesus chooses to move beyond Judea to teach, proclaim God's Kingdom, to heal **AND** to call those who would follow and journey with him.

"Come follow me."

This Jewish Messiah has a universal message!  
Epiphany begins a journey of discovery with the Wise Men setting the example, following the star and trusting their judgement that this is God's leading. — The journey continues and week by week we get another piece of the puzzle.

["Something which enlightens and makes known" - is an "epiphany" of Jesus.]

Until we get to the last Sunday (of Epiphany) where the fullness of who Jesus is is seen to shine through.

I wonder if the message of this day is that in our journey we are called to move between the safe ground of our home territory and the unsure and often unsafe ground of unchartered and unknown territory. As James and John

move from the known to the unknown to fish for *people*. Is it a message that we cannot always live safely within the walls of the church but that as we move beyond our circle of Christian family we continue to do God's work — but that we can always return for nurture and encouragement — And I hope we find it!

In Corinthians Paul speaks of his baptising and preaching mission among the Corinthians — recognising that he only baptized a couple and that his teaching and preaching was **not** with great eloquence because **what** he preached — the cross of Christ— has its own profound message.

His sadness is that the Church is divided with people following its various leaders — and not Christ.

Disunity among the Christian family — will never enable our moving out — and it will never be able to make us welcome when we come back.

Disunity disables community and it disables mission!  
(Home and Away?)

So what do we discover today? What is today's Epiphany?

Jesus' mission is universal, and while keeping the clear overall purpose in mind, the way of working it out may well need to change.

That we as Christians are called to create, with God, a Church which nurtures, encourages, challenges and refreshes us in its membership and enables us to move into less safe territory in the wider world.