

Jesus is the light for all people

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Reverend Rebecca Newland

The Epiphany, Year B, 1 January 2012

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Today is the feast of the Epiphany, when the three magi came to visit the baby Jesus. Epiphany means disclosure, manifestation, unveiling or appearance. It is the feast where the great gift of Christmas, Jesus, is revealed for who and what he is, that he or God cannot be limited to any one nation or people.

The *magi*, who came from non-Jewish nations, remind us that God's New Kingdom cannot be limited to the Jews or any other nation. The *magi* symbolise that divine promise given to Abraham in the book of Genesis. It is for "*all peoples on earth*" (Genesis 12:3). The *magi* also pre-empt John's vision of heaven in the book of revelation where people from "*every nation, tribe, people, and language*" are part of God's plan and purpose. The new king Jesus abolishes not only the barriers of nation, race and ethnicity. He also transcends all other boundaries for in Christ (and here is one of my favourite verses from Galatians), "*there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28); the *magi* were only the tip of a very big iceberg.

Today is also the first day of 2012, the new year. So it seems appropriate that on this day the other theme of epiphany is all about light, the light of Christ that reveals the nature of God, God's very glory, and that Christ is the light of the world. Taking the journey to the light has been a part of human existence since humans first looked up at the stars.

The other great theme of epiphany is darkness. In fact darkness is a theme that has been hovering all through Advent and Christmas itself. Just think of the progressive lighting of the Advent candles, the light glowing ever more strongly in the darkness or the fact that the Christ was born in the middle of the night, in the darkness. Isaiah, our main prophet throughout that time, talks about the darkness and light throughout the Advent readings. In today's reading he speaks of a thick darkness that covers the earth and the peoples of the earth. In our Gospel reading we have the epitome of moral darkness, King Herod.

There are, in fact, five Herods in the New Testament, and to a person they all persecuted Jesus and the early church. In addition to Herod the Great, who is the Herod of our gospel passage today and the homicidal maniac who ordered the murder of the Jewish innocents, there is his older son Herod Archelaus. Then there's Herod's younger son, Herod the Tetrarch who is famous for murdering John the Baptist. Fourth, there's Herod King Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, who murdered James and tried to murder Peter. Finally, there's King Agrippa's son, also named Herod Agrippa, who bantered with Paul and mocked him.

All these Herods do the opposite of the *magi* and those who attempt to walk in the light. They attempt to bring down the dark curtain over the light of Jesus Christ. But as we know the light simply cannot be overcome. As John 1:5 states, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*". But the darkness still exists and we can all become lost in it. We can become lost in despair and hopelessness. We can be lost in misleading paths and byways and we can choose to turn our backs on the light.

The beginning of a new year can be a fruitful time to look back over the year that has been and ask, "In what ways did I lose my way last year?" This is not meant to be an excuse to beat ourselves up. It is about learning from our own lives and decisions. We can also ask, "How am I going to follow the light of Christ this year?"

So this is where I am not going to say any more. After farewelling the old year last night and embarking in a new one this morning I don't think you need to listen any more to me waffle on. Instead we will spend five minutes in silence wondering about these two questions. Five minutes will perhaps seem like an eternity but as you sit in silence ask God to reveal the answers for you. Listen to your heart. Read a favourite psalm if it helps, or just sit and be still. Know that the light of Christ is with you and in you.

So here are the two questions again.

“In what ways did you loose your way last year?”

“How are you going to follow the light of Christ this year?”