
Scripture, Reflection, Church news and up-to-date info

5th January 2025

Epiphany

Happy new year it is a pleasure to back delivering the latest church info after taking time off, hope everyone had a blessed Christmas and New Years.

This week

St Barnabas -
Eucharist
9:30 am

Holy Trinity -
Eucharist
11 am

Bible Study (St
Barnabas)
Wednesday
10 am

Worship on
Wednesday

Holy Trinity
(WOW)

7 pm



Collect

Almighty God,
in the birth of your Son
you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate
Word,
and shown us the fullness of your love:
help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love
that we may know the fullness of his joy;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Old Testament Isaiah 60; 1-6

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon
you. See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you. Nations will
come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the
hip. Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will
come. Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord

Epistle - Ephesians; 1-12

For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

The Gospel - Matthew 2;1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people, Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route

Reflection

I wonder, was Herod right to be fearful of this baby, born king of the Jews, or was his fear misplaced?

Jesus never sought Herod's throne, he never gained political power, and was executed a criminal. And so, in one sense Herod, amidst the trappings of Roman power, really had nothing to fear at all. But in another sense, this new king was about to turn heaven and earth upside down. A new kingdom was breaking in, one against which the power of tyranny could never ultimately stand.

Whether misplaced or not, Herod's fear led him to commit one of the greatest atrocities recorded for us in the New Testament, the event usually called the 'slaughter of the holy innocents'

. (Recorded for us a little later in chapter 2, but important to mention none the less). Out of fear of this baby, out of tyrannical and paranoid fear, Herod had all the boys in Bethlehem who were under two years old put to death.

For many of us, our minds cannot but turn from thinking about Herod to the tyrants of our day. I write this shortly after the collapse of Assad's regime in Syria. Whilst much was already known about the brutalities of that regime, the personal stories that have been coming out since have been stomach churning. Was it out of fear of losing power, that he ruled his nation with an iron fist? Perhaps fear is

the deep root of most tyrannical acts, a perception that brutality is the only way to keep power, to cling tightly to what one has; crush dissent, trample minorities, enforce a singular perspective.

In Bethlehem, as the full force of such brutal power was on display, as the darkness covered the earth (so our passage from Isaiah puts it) a small flickering light was shining somewhere in Egypt, hidden by parents who had every reason to fear, and yet instead displayed great love to this gift wrapped in swaddling.

Matthew's Gospel records for us two radically different visions of power and authority. One is based on fear. It is driven by fear, and it rules by fear. The other, is based on love.

The Nativity Scene, at its heart, and even more so with the Magi included, is nothing other than a picture of love. Of course, we can think of the love within the holy family. But on this day, and perhaps more importantly, we see in the Nativity Scene, love bursting open the door to let in these strangers from foreign fields. These foreigners were not compelled to come, rather they were drawn by the light, for they saw something in this baby of what was to be.

Drawn by the light, these magi saw in Jesus a vision of a new kingdom and a new way. They saw the fulfilment of Psalm 72 in which is envisioned a king who rules with justice and equity. They saw too the possibility of a kingdom without borders and without barriers (which our reading from Ephesians emphasises). In Jesus, they saw the possibility of a new kingdom built on love - that seeks justice for all, that seeks to find a

place for all, in which there are no outsiders and in which no one is excluded.

Is this not what our Nativity Scenes visually show us? A baby in a shed, surrounded by animals, a few smelly shepherds and now some wealthy foreign mystics as well. What is this image if not an image of a very different kind of kingdom built on a very different kind of power?

A vision of a different kingdom and a different form of power is not enough though. In the end we also need to know which will win through. Is there nothing more powerful than brute force, tyrannical power? The rest of the story of Christ gives us the answer. Fear cannot win out. Only love can.

In the face of the fears of Herod (whoever or whatever he might represent on the small or global stage) we are called to be people who follow a very different king, knowing that this king's reign will never end. May we live in the light of this Epiphany. Amen.

Notices

5/03/2025 **Ash Wednesday** 7pm Holy trinity Waterhead

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