

the Epiphany – a revelatory gift to all

a sermon preached on

the feast of the Epiphany and the baptism of ruby lea stone

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at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

by mother emily fraser

the lections: Isaiah 60: 1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3: 1-12; Matthew 2: 1-12

Having marked the feast of the Holy Innocents last Sunday, it might seem a little strange to go slightly backwards in the narrative of the Nativity to mark the Epiphany today. Rather than continue on in a linear progression, we've backtracked from the ending of last Sunday's gospel reading; today we heard of the commissioning of the Magi by Herod to find the Christ-Child, and their arrival at the stable in Bethlehem. We find ourselves immersed in the jubilation of the Magi as they honour the Christ with their gifts, continuing the praise of the shepherds and the angels who gathered at the stable before them.

So, as the gospel reading begins, the Magi bear gifts for the infant Christ, and are following the star to Bethlehem to behold the Christ-Child in the manger. They have heard in prophecies that he will be born, and they follow the star so they can praise and honour him as a king.

Along the way they come to Jerusalem, and ask for news of the Christ, the 'child who has been born King of the Jews'. They explain that they wish to do him homage.

This alarms Herod, the King of Jerusalem, who does not wish to lose his power and his place, and it is said that the whole of Jerusalem was alarmed, most likely at the potential for war and violence that would arise from a challenge for the crown. All guile, Herod asks for any news of the Christ to be shared with him, sending the Magi on their way, asking them to tell him where and when they find the Christ-Child, as he also wishes to pay him homage. His true intentions, however, are far from pure, and we heard last week of Herod's ruthless violence against the children of Bethlehem, an awful moment where human nature's cruelty and lust for power turned on its most innocent and vulnerable.

But that's jumping ahead. The Magi travel on to Bethlehem, and find the Christ, and, with joy, with enter the stable and behold Mary, Joseph and the new-born infant. They kneel, in homage, and make their devotion. They offer rich gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh; precious gifts for a new-born king.

Having made their devotion, having beheld the Christ and honoured him as the light of the world, the Magi dream a prophetic dream, and know not to return to Herod. They leave for their own homes by another way.

This visit of the Magi to Bethlehem is known as the Epiphany. It is a moment of revelation, where Christ was revealed to the Magi, and where the Magi rejoice to see the Christ. We still call a profound revelation an epiphany, and rightly too. When we call something we experience an epiphany, we imbue that moment with a sense the wonder that the Magi felt when they saw the Christ. To call something an epiphany means that it was a moment of revelation, but also a moment which is precious, to be treasured, and to be pondered deeply in the heart.

My prayer for us as we celebrate the Epiphany is that we may give thanks for all those epiphanies we have experienced, large and small, holding them before God as the Magi offered their gifts.

Today, in addition to celebrating the Epiphany, we will baptise Ruby Lea Stone. Baptism is also a thanksgiving; when we baptise an infant, it is a thanksgiving for new life, a thanksgiving for faith.

Baptism is a thanksgiving to God that we are the children of God, known and beloved, each of us. We are washed in water, signed with the oil of chrism, and presented with the light, the light of Christ. The symbols of water, oil and light are not the way in which God enters Ruby's life, but are an outward sign of the grace within her and within us. They are outward signs by which we see her become what she already is – God's beloved daughter. These signs are communal, they are signs for us all, and show that we are all, from before our birth, marked as God's, and known, and loved.

The words of the prophet Isaiah, 'arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you', can be re-interpreted to refer to Ruby today, as she is baptised and welcomed into the body of Christ. This is a joyous day for Ruby, and her parents and her Godparents, and for us, as we celebrate with them and welcome them and welcome Ruby as members with us of the Body of Christ.

So let us now gather around the font in preparation for Ruby's baptism.

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