

Made manifest

8 1 12

Lord God,
the bright splendour whom the nations seek:
may we who with the wise men
 have been drawn to your light
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

My text today is from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 3,
'The mystery was made known to me by revelation'.

On 5th January with Twelfth Night, Christmastide comes to an end. Spring is still far off. Winter is still very much with us. Now in the Sundays leading up to Candlemas on 2nd February which we will celebrate early here on church on 29th January, we move seamlessly from the Incarnation to the Epiphany. The theme of Christmas – Emmanuel, 'God with us' – moves seamlessly to the theme of Epiphany – 'God made manifest to us'.

For us as Christians, Epiphany should be just as exciting as Christmas because of this parallel theme – God making himself manifest to us, God revealing himself to us. And it is the 'to us', who exactly the 'us' is, which makes the Epiphany so important.

The shepherds, who were minding their sheep out on the hillside above Bethlehem, were undoubtedly Jewish. The wise men, who noted the rising of the star in the East, were anything but. And this is the revolutionary nature of the Epiphany – that God, our God, is not simply a God of his Chosen People, the Jews but the God of all people. The ‘us’ now means all of us. This is precisely the shock of Simeon’s prophetic words in the Nunc Dimittis when in the Temple at Jerusalem he holds the 40-day-old baby Jesus in his arms and predicts that through him God will be a light to reveal himself to the Gentiles. By following the star, the wise men come eventually to Bethlehem where they find what they have been looking for.

And this partnership of God revealing himself to Man and Man looking for God is what I want to focus on this morning. Fundamental to Christianity is the idea of revelation. Revelation – that God is speaking to us; that God is making himself known to us. The poetic description of the Incarnation at the start of John’s gospel describes Jesus’ birth as **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us**. God who is spirit is here embodied. The Word of God now has a human mouth, lips and a tongue with which to speak directly to us. And it is in the written word of God, the Bible, that we can hear God speaking to us today.

And what do we hear? The words of St Paul that are my text – **‘The mystery was made known to me by revelation’**. Paul was an educated Jew who had had Gamaliel as his teacher. He knew the Law and the Prophets by heart. But on the road to Damascus, his heart was changed as he personally encountered Jesus. In that voice and through that light his life was turned around. Instead of being a

persecutor of the followers of the Way, he became a signpost to show people the Way to find God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ.

But though God reveals himself to us, we have to be paying attention. Certainly Mary's attention was engaged when the angel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her about God's plan for her. Certainly Joseph's attention was engaged when an angel appeared to him in a dream to tell him to marry Mary. But whether we encounter God and listen to him speak to us is down to us – our choice. Do you remember in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – what happened after they had eaten the apple? It dawned on them that they were naked and they hid from God among the trees. In the cool of the evening when he walked in the Garden, God called to Adam but Adam was too ashamed to come and hid from him. This basic truth all teachers know – that for teaching and learning to take place, a pupil first needs to be present in mind and body.

So let me leave you with this parallel thought: God is a God who manifests himself to us, a God who reveals himself to us and to all people. But are we paying attention?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
St Bartholomew's, Dinard
8th January, 2012*

