

## Epiphany

6 1 13

O God,  
who by the leading of a star  
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:  
mercifully grant that we,  
who know you now by faith,  
may at last behold your glory face-to-face.

My text today may be found in the book of the prophet Isaiah chapter 60, verse 1:

*'Arise, shine: for your light has come,  
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.'*

One of the joys of growing old is the wealth of our store of memories. Oddly enough, it can be the memories of early on, of our youth, that can be so vivid while we may quickly forget what we may have done only last week. I can still recall in some detail the texts I studied for 'A' level. One of them was a semi-autobiographical novel by the Irish writer, James Joyce, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'. A book about growing up, it made a deep impression on my adolescent mind: Joyce's Catholicism; the thought he might become a priest; his love of words and ideas; his physical attraction to the opposite sex. At the end of the fourth chapter, Joyce has a revelation of what in fact is his true vocation: instead of being called to become a priest, he realises that he should be a writer, that he is being called to be 'a priest of the eternal imagination'. The technical

term that Joyce uses to describe that moment of understanding, of insight, of the truth made manifest to him, is 'epiphany'. That moment as a youngman on the beach is an epiphany for Joyce and he now knows what he must do.

Today, on the Feast of the Epiphany, we return to the original context for the word epiphany in a Christian, sense – the epiphany of the birth of Christ to the Wise Men.

When the Wise Men arrive in Jerusalem and go to seek an audience with King Herod, their question to him is informative. They ask, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?' If I were Herod, I'd have had the equivalent an electric shock – though, of course, if I were Herod, then I'd be unlikely to describe it as such since at that moment in time electricity had not yet been discovered ! The shock is in the question: it's not whether or not this child has been born; it's where is he ? These astrologers, wise men, magi are well versed in the hidden mysteries of the heavens and they know for a fact, know for certain, that the child has been born. Why do they know ? How do they know ? They know because they can say with certainty 'we have observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage'. These intelligent, learned men have observed something extraordinary, something special, a new significant star and not only do they see it for themselves but they know what it means. We live in a world of telescopes and astronomical observations. Their world was different; they observed the night sky with the naked eye, and for them a new star in the heavens of that magnitude could mean one thing only – that a significant person had been born

and to their mind, he is the Jewish Messiah. And hence Herod's unease hearing of the birth of someone who could challenge his throne.

To me two things are significant about the Epiphany. One is to whom the truth is made manifest; the other is the fact of such a manifestation.

The Old Testament is about the revelation of God to his Chosen People, the Jews. The New Testament is about the extension of that manifestation to all people everywhere. In his letter to the Ephesians, in the passage at the start of chapter 3 that we heard this morning, Paul is making this point clearly: that as the Apostle to the Gentiles, he has been called to witness to the truth of the Gospel to all people everywhere. He writes, **'the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.'** Now that is a bomb-shell that explodes the idea that God is a God exclusive to the Chosen People, Jews who have been circumcised according to the Covenant with Abraham and in accordance with the Law of Moses. And the fact that wise men came from the east and were clearly foreigners, uncircumcised Gentiles, makes the point clearly that God is a God of all people everywhere.

And my second point - that God reveals himself to us, and speaks to us in so many different ways today. How? Let me use the image of a television. In the chaplaincy apartment, I have a modest flat screen TV and most of the time it sits there silent. If I want it to work, I have to switch it on. And the same is true of God. If we want to see God; we need to be switched on: to have our eyes open. If we want to hear God, we need to be listening. I saw the film 'the Life of Pi' last

week and through the eyes of Piscine Molitor Patel, the Pi of the title, we can see something of the rich variety of ways God may manifest himself.

So on this the Feast of the Epiphany, let us as Gentiles give thanks that God had manifested himself not only to our fellow-heirs, the Jews, but to all people at all times and in all places – and that manifestation, that epiphany is something, thank God, that can be current for us all if only we are prepared to take the time and make the effort to look and to listen for ourselves.

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*

*6<sup>th</sup> January, 2013*

G: Sermon 27 : re Epiphany

