

Epiphany

3 1 16

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.

Our text may be found in today's gospel and is Matthew chapter 2 and verse 2:

‘ . . . we observed his star in the East. . . ’

Today, three days early, we are observing the feast of the Epiphany – three days early because this major festival falls on a Wednesday this year so it is permissible to transfer it to the Sunday before so we can have the chance to experience the joy of this significant moment in the journey of our faith.

It is significant because of what the word epiphany means in Greek. It is significant because of who experienced this epiphany. It is significant because of what has gone before and what can now go on as a result of what has gone on.

So what does the word epiphany mean ? in Greek, ἐπιφάνεια (epiphania) means manifestation, a shewing. Epiphany is when the numinous is made manifest: mortal eyes in mortal flesh experience God at first-hand. An epiphany is a God-

encounter when we feel touched by the presence of God; for example, Moses and the burning bush; for example, Peter, James and John with Jesus transfigured on Mt Hermon.

And the God encounter that brings three wise men to the court of Herod the Great in Jerusalem is the rising in the east of a previously unseen star. These three men are not Jews; they are goyim – Gentiles. These non-Jews are magi, astrologers, serious scholars who knew the map of the sky at night by heart. And when they saw a new star arising in the east and noted its magnitude and mapped its progress, they knew exactly what it meant – a significant birth – someone so special it motivated them to set off on a journey to find him and to pay their respects.

And what had gone on before is embodied by what we mark on January 1st. Believe it or not, the event we remember on the first day of the new year is not only the naming of the baby Jesus but his circumcision. Circumcision was the outward mark of God's covenant with Abraham. From that moment of time on, all Jewish boys would have had their foreskins cut off as a sign of the covenant relationship that God established between himself and his Chosen People, the Jews. What the Epiphany shows us in the journey of the Wise Men to Bethlehem is that God is reaching out not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. No longer is circumcision to be a precondition of a loving relationship with our creator and redeemer. St Paul neatly redefines what circumcision should be: a spiritual fact rather than an actual act ! In Romans 3 v29, he writes that **'real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual not literal.'**

So why is today special ? Because by moving Epiphany closer to the Circumcision of Christ, we are reminded of Simeon's prophetic words when he held the 40-day-old baby Jesus in his arms and prophesied:

'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace
according to their word;
for mine eyes have seen thy salvation ,
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
a light to lighten the Gentiles
and the glory of thy people Israel.'

(Luke 2 29 - 32)

Our faith has moved on – not now 'either . . . or' but 'both . . . and'. Not now Jew but not Gentile, but now Jew and Gentile alike, a universal call for us all to be Children of God, not exclusive but inclusive is the love of God for Man.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

3rd January, 2016

G: Sermons 33 : Epiphany

