

Epiphany: Welcome the Light

Welcome and Introduction Revd Wendy Gourlay

Welcome from the Mid Loes Deanery and the last of our reflective services for the Christmas Season, entitled 'Epiphany: Welcome the Light'.

Our liturgy for worship, comes from two Ordained clergy - David Adam, who was the vicar of Lindisfarne and has inspired many to worship in the Celtic tradition – and John Cox, who was Archdeacon of Sudbury, here in Suffolk, before his post of Diocesan Director of Education until his retirement in 2010.

In this final Christmas Season service, we hear another imaginative story of a biblical character, for us to reflect upon. Today's epiphany tale is recorded in front of original artwork, that was painted for Grundisburgh Cribfest 2018. The painting is currently on display in St Mary's Church, Monewden. Its creation was inspired by a magnificent sandstone outcrop in Arches National Park, U.S.A: the skyline silhouette reminding me of three Magi heading out on their spiritual journey, to 'welcome the light.'

Opening scripture

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: they who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them the light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

Gathering prayer

Jesus, Word made flesh dwelling among us, **Come, lighten our darkness.**

Jesus, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, **Come, lighten our darkness**

Jesus, adored by the Wise Men, **Come lighten our darkness.**

Jesus, revealed to the world, **Come, lighten our darkness.**

Candle-lighting read by Jackie Clark

Jesus here and with us now, come, lighten our darkness.

Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. A light that no darkness can extinguish.

Blessed are you, Lord God, who by the leading of a star brought the Wise Men to come before Jesus. Through him, who is our Saviour, you reveal your love and light to the whole world. In our seeking, guide us that we may come before you, that we may come to know you, to love you and to worship you this day and always. Blessed are you Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lord God, to live without you is to walk in the darkness: to live in awareness of you is to live in the light. Help us to know and to reveal your love and your light through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Carol As with gladness men of old

Opening Prayer and Confession led by Heather Whiting

Lord of grace, **fill our hearts with hope.**

Lord of promise, **fill our hearts with laughter.**

Lord of love, **fill our hearts with wonder.**

Lord Jesus, the Light of the World,
illumine our hearts and forgive our blindness. Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, king of all, and child of Mary,
grant us understanding and forgive our dullness. Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, Word of Salvation and bringer of Good News,
forgive our deafness. Lord have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Scripture - Proverbs 3:13-22 read by Amber Pearce-Wright

Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew.

My child, do not let these escape from your sight: keep sound wisdom and prudence, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.

For the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Reflective Story – written by Revd John Cox - Matthew 2: 1-12

‘Melchior, the wise man: we thought we knew’.

Pray, forgive my keeping you waiting. I have been to the bazaar and was unusually delayed. I hope my servants have welcomed you and offered you some mint tea.

As I say, I was in the bazaar when out of nowhere I was confronted by a question of great profundity. An urchin ran from behind a carpet stall, stood right there in front of me and stared at me. ‘Who are you?’ he asked and without waiting for an answer ran off again. Not *what* but *who* are you? I’ve been repeating that question to myself all the way home. I am Melchior I might have said – but my name is no more than a label on the market stall of humanity.

A man? Yes. The son, a father, an uncle, a neighbour? Yes. Perhaps then I am the sum of my relationships. But I am also a Magus, a so-called wise man. An observer of events in nature and the world. A watcher and waiter who sees, but more than that, interprets what he sees.

If you wish to have knowledge you must seek more than mere data. It is the meaning within and behind and between the facts that makes for wisdom. Interpretations and meanings are discovered after much searching. They reveal themselves to the true seeker. But even then I have no guarantees they are right. There are surprises in the search that can merely lead to more questions. Let me explain with a story – a true one.

Many years ago some friends and I were particularly interested in the message given to us in the stars. Their regularity tells much but it was the disjunction of that regularity that was of particular interest. We had noticed the way in which the path of the stars you would know as Venus and Saturn was being crossed by Jupiter, accompanied by the appearance of a different very bright, evanescent star. It presented us with a puzzle. All that we had learnt indicated that this was herald to a birth. Not just an ordinary birth but one of great significance, somewhere to the west. A king, we thought. I was intrigued and we decided to test our theory, for that is the way the quest for knowledge works.

We prepared for a long journey with both camels and donkeys and each of us, myself and my two companions, had a couple of servants for both our comfort and our protection. We set out with no precise knowledge of where we would end up. Our guides were the stars and we made careful observations each night so as to determine the direction for the following day. We went via Babylonia, followed the Euphrates and entered Palestine from the north east. The general direction was clearly towards Jerusalem, and that of course made great sense since it was there that Herod had his palace.

All the signs indicated that the birth we had seen heralded in the star formation was that of a new king of the Jews. So it was to Herod's palace that we made our way, convinced both of the accuracy of our observations and of their meaning.

We were given a polite, though not particularly warm welcome. As our custom dictates, we had gifts to present both to the king and to the newborn child. The latter we wished to present in person and so we asked if we could see the infant king. The response was guarded and we were kept waiting for a considerable time – way beyond the point of courtesy. We were also puzzled for there were no signs of celebration that we had expected at the birth of an heir. But we had had little contact previously with the Jews and we put it down to local custom. After what must have been several hours we were told that no birth had occurred at the palace but that we should go to a town to the south east, called Bethlehem. Apparently their own wise men in the past had predicted a king would be born there. These things are possible of course and we had, perhaps unwisely, made assumptions in directing our path to the palace.

We set off again and soon came to this rather unpromising little town. We found the caravan lodge and, having left the camels and donkeys along with the other camel trains, set off to the nearby resting house to enquire of news of the royal baby. It was there we found this young couple and their child.

There are times when despite the careful observations, the calculations and hypotheses, the weighing of the evidence and reference to the manuals, it's not your head that gets the answer but your heart. You just know that the answer you sort is there in front of you. Not at all as you expected. Not at all in the place you were looking for it. The answer finds you. In a tatty little lodging-house in downtown Bethlehem, amidst the traders and travellers was this ordinary family with an extraordinary son. It didn't make sense. It turned all we had expected upside down. We were certain yet unsure, all at the same time. Certain enough to pay him homage and present our gifts, but uncertain where it left our science. We had made our observations. We were sure of our interpretation, but what in fact we had come to, who in fact we had seen, we were never sure.

We never did return to the palace to give them the news. Casper had a dream of warning and we left next morning by a different route.

I invite you to a short period of reflection, accompanied by the tunes, 'Go tell it on the mountain' (Traditional) and 'God with us' © 2014 Wendy Gourlay

Intercessions led by Chris Clarke

Let us come to our Saviour with joy and wonder, offering our prayers to our heavenly Father.

We give thanks for wisdom and knowledge, for the insights of past ages and for the discoveries of today, most especially the new vaccinations to protect humanity against coronavirus.

We pray for scientists and investigators, for researchers and technicians, that the results of their work may be used for the benefit of all.

Lord of glory, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for artists and novelists, for poets and musicians, whose works shine in our imagination and dance through our feelings.

May we value their insights and listen to the voice of our hearts.

Lord of glory, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for all who help us in our quest for knowledge, for those who have taught us and inspired us to learn.

We pray for teachers and lecturers and all who work in schools and colleges, that, being renewed in strength, they may work with integrity and passion to lead others to wisdom.

Lord of glory, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for our Medical Staff, for Carers and Essential Workers: for the generosity of others and all who share their time, their possessions and themselves. We pray for a generous spirit, that we might offer the gifts you have given to us for the well-being of those in need.

Lord of glory, hear our prayer

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us so we pray

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come, thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

Carol – We three kings

A prayer of special intention – In the light of God read by Jackie Clark

Blessed be God, who by the leading of a star brought the Wise Men to Christ the King. **The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.**

Blessed be God, who is the God of all the nations.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Blessed be God, who comes to all peoples, in all places and all the time.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Christ was proclaimed by the angels.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Christ was worshipped by the Shepherds.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Christ was adored by the Wise Men.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Christ is worshipped throughout the world.
The Word has become flesh and now lives among us.

Closing Prayer Revd Wendy Gourlay

Lord, we come to the light of your presence and to your love.
Lord, whom we sought in the sky, you are found here among us.
Lord, who remained long hidden from sight, you are found in an infant.
Today we rejoice, for heaven has come to earth: earth is taken up into heaven.
God is found in human flesh and our humanity is taken up into God.
He whom the universe could not contain is found in a tiny child.
We come and adore with those who seek you.
We acknowledge you as our King and our God.
We know you have shared in our sorrows to redeem us.
We offer ourselves to you who came down to raise us up.
We adore you, Christ our Lord.

Blessing

May Christ our Lord, the Baby of Bethlehem and King of all, to whom Wise Men came and bowed in worship, reveal to you the glory of his presence:
and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, rest upon you
and surround you, today and always. **Amen.**

Credits:

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Meditation Tune: 'God with us' © 2014 Wendy Gourlay

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