

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH

EPIPHANY

January 9th



The Magi - Richard Hook

WORSHIP AT HOME

While the Christmas Season finished on the 6th December during this last week, today we mark Epiphany, the last day of the season. Especially today we remember the coming of the magi, wise ones from the east, who came seeking to discover the significant one whose birth the star foretold. The birth of this “king” was of one who would rule over a kingdom of God’s justice and peace, a reign which we still celebrate each Christmas.

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Carve out a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Prayer

Who are you, Jesus?

It seems that people have always wanted to know.
From the beginning when foreigners travelled great distances
just to see you,
To now when trying to answer this question
can lead to heated debate and even violent conflict.

Who are you, really?

There is no shortage of names for you –
Son of God, Messiah, Lord, Anointed One, Suffering Servant,
The One born King of the Jews,
... each one like a doorway into greater mystery,
an invitation to dive into depths
that are beyond our capacity to fathom.

We want to know you, Jesus
we want to touch something of the truth of who you are
and so even as we allow our minds to wrestle
with ideas about you,
we open our hearts that your radiant presence,
may shine in,
may change us,
and may draw us into an eternity
of learning and following the journey you call us to.

Give us the alert, inner eye, that we may see,
searching hearts, seeking the truth,
courageous wills, ready to set out,
patience and persistence, to be able to stay the course
that we may reach the destination
and discover your glory and our life's goal. Amen

The prophet Isaiah 60. 1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Psalms 72. 1-7, 10-14

Of Solomon

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.
May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

The letter to the Ephesians 3. 1-6

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew 2. 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”’



The adoration of the Magi ~ Edward Burne-Jones - tapestry

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reflecting

I was at a memorial service on Thursday. It was an occasion to mark the death of someone who had died during the lockdown, when borders were closed and to be able gather together to remember and give thanks. One of the readings we heard, often read at funerals, was the passage from Ecclesiastes: *for everything there is a time ...*

The worship leader reminded us that these were words which were written more than 3000 years ago and which still resonate and reassure us all this time later in all the light and dark of our

human reality. There is great comfort in the truth that the human predicament has not, does not change and that words which gave reassurance then, still do so for us now.

Likewise, the words of both the prophet Isaiah and the Psalmist also resonate with us and reassure us of the nature and longings of God. Both express a longing for a ruler and a reign of justice and peace and equity. While we long for these things, and the longings of these ancient writers resonate within us, we know that the reality of our world is too often anything but this for the needy, the poor, the weak. The first anniversary this week of the storming of the Capitol building in the USA is a reminder of how easily politics becomes distracted and distanced from the real needs of the people.

At Epiphany we celebrate the light shining in the darkness in the birth of the Christ-child, especially the recognition of this breaking in of God by the wise men from the east. Theirs is a pattern which we are invited to follow. They set out seeking the Christ-child, they are not sure what the star heralds, but they set everything aside to seek and to understand. Their seeking is a pattern for us as signs in our own lives prompt us to follow and seek.

Prayers of the people – prepared by Warwick Barry

Loving God we are beginning to learn
that this is a fragile world
you've placed into our care.
But there are times, Lord,
when we are reminded
of our human fragility,
needing your loving care
through times of anxiety
and illness, and contagious disease.

In Isaiah you have reminded us of your promise and presence,

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you." (NIV)

This time now is going to be a struggle, Lord.
The act of rising, journeying,
conversation, bustling crowds,
people we encounter locally or whilst away,
people we meet in retail places.
Be our confidence,
and assurance,
in the words that we speak.
Be our freedom,
and guidance,
as we walk through these streets.
This time is going to be a struggle, Lord.

Keep my head above water,
keep my eyes fixed on you.

The door through which we enter
into the world can be for some
more than a handle to be turned,
more than a barrier to be crossed.

There is comfort and security
in isolation, a kind of peace
behind locked doors.

And the alternative?

Fear in venturing beyond the known.

Fear in the interaction with others.

Fear of illness and anxiety.

For those whose hearts are troubled
or spirits crushed

by current global circumstances,

Good Lord, deliver us,

bring healing and wholeness

of mind, body and spirit,

and freedom

to be the person

we were always meant to be.

We pray for all who are bearing heavy burdens:

those facing difficulties and problems to which they can see no solutions,

wrestling with inner fears and racked by anxiety for themselves or loved ones;

troubled about money, health, work or relationships; for those who mourn the many who have
died, family, friends and loved ones.

All who crave rest for their souls but cannot find it.

We pray for the influence of Your Holy Spirit in the troubled places of the world. We especially
remember this day the lands and the people of Iran, Iraq and Syria and those from these places
who call Australia home; where economic struggles, religious hardship and conflict cause unrest,
pain and resentment in their wider populaces.

Fill us with Your passion for justice that we may strive to build bridges of reconciliation and bring
hope in times of darkness.

Gracious God, we pray for the sick who because of their weariness or pain find it difficult to pray;
may they be aware of our prayer on their behalf and accept graciously the support and love of
their families and friends within both the Church and the wider community. Bring healing,
comfort and well-being to all on this journey.

We pray for all baptised Christians throughout the world especially for those preparing for
Baptism in their Church. We raise before you for the candidates, parents, and godparents
and pray that they be given the grace, courage and perseverance to faithfully keep the promises
they will make. As we remember your son Jesus' baptism and His growing years in Nazareth and
the promise of His Spirit living within us too.

We also remember those people who are not with us today, perhaps through illness, other circumstances or because they are on holiday. May your Spirit be with them and keep them safe and refresh them. (pause) Let us think of the people sitting on either side of us and ask that God will be especially close to them in the days ahead. May they know your love and presence at all times. (pause) Lord thankyou that you are with us too in all things.

Lord, thank You that You listen to our prayers – spoken and unspoken – in Jesus name. Amen

Blessing

May the light of Christ shine on you:
like Mary, may you find in yourself
a place of expectant waiting for the Christ to grow,
like Joseph, may you find in yourself
a place of compassionate welcome,
like the shepherds, may you respond
with unabashed joy to the Good News, and
like the wise men, may you seek
until you find God made flesh in yourself.

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NEWS AND NOTICES

DEMOLITION OF THE HALLS

– CLOSURE OF THE CHURCH SITE FROM 24TH JANUARY

The demolition of the Booran Rd hall and the North Rd hall is scheduled to **begin on the 24th January**. During this time the entire church site will be out-of-bounds. We will not have access to the church and the office will be relocated for the duration of the works.