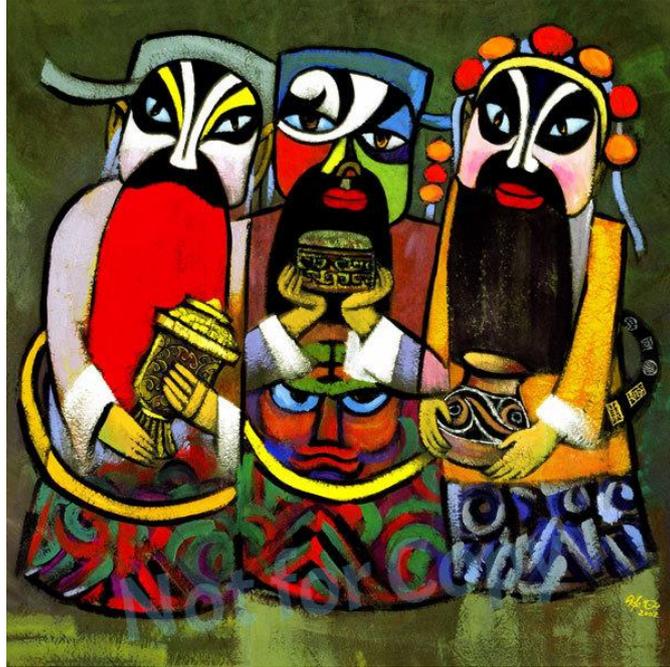


Epiphany Changing the World

Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest
Sunday, January 9th, 2021



The Magi: He Qi

Today, January 9th, rather than focus upon the Gospel reading concerning the Baptism of Jesus, I would like to look back to January 6th, the feast of Epiphany, which takes its name from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, meaning disclosure, unveiling. Epiphany really stands as the highpoint of Christmas: it looks forward to the mission of the Christian church couched in terms of Jesus as the light of the world. For the Catholic church, Epiphany is just one day, January 6th, while the period after Epiphany through till Lent is considered as part of “ordinary time”. For the Protestant tradition, we continue after Epiphany with the season of Epiphany, spending time thinking through the mission of the church in the modern world: that is certainly the emphasis of the Uniting Church. As we think about Christian mission in 2019, the central Gospel reading is Matthew 2:1-12. It concerns the story of the response of the three magi and Herod to the birth of Jesus and provides us with insights from ‘left field’. In it, the insiders, the apparent believers of which Herod is but one, is bent upon the destruction of Jesus, seeing him as a usurper, set upon destabilizing the religious-political consensus. On the one other hand, the outsiders, the ‘pagan’ magi, see, discern, and ultimately pay homage to Jesus.

GATHERING

Organ Prelude

Greeting

In the name of God,
In the name of the Son,
In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

God has given us a Light for all nations:
So that we may live out the salvation offered to all:
that peace with justice may reach every corner of the earth.
This is the mission of the Christian church

Welcome and Lighting the Community Candle

Acknowledgement of Country

Hymn TiS 268

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!
Let earth receive its King;
let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven
and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns!
Let us our songs employ;
while fields and streams,
rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness
and wonders of His love,
and wonders of His love,
and wonders, and wonders of His love.

Isaac Watts. 1674-1748 Words out of copyright.
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Prayers in which we Confess our Deafness

A child once dreamed the Voice was calling his name... 'Samuel',
fisherman once heard the Voice when a young man bid them follow,
and still the Voice beckons today... can you hear?

Here I am. Send me.

Moses protested vehemently as the Voice spoke at the burning bush,
Mary stood amazed as the Voice proclaimed impending birth,
and still the Voice beckons today... can you hear?

Here I am. Send me.

Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama
followed the Voice to the front of the bus,
Martin Luther King, Jr. heard the Voice as the bullet shattered,
and still the Voice beckons today... can you hear?

Here I am. Send me.

The Voice beckons from humble places...
in the tears of hungry children,
in the cries of the frail and frightened elderly,
in the pleas of those whose dreams have been too long deferred,
and still the Voice beckons today... can you hear?

Here I am. Send me.

A timid believer pauses to listen to the Voice,
a struggling church hears the Voice and turns,
and still the Voice beckons today... can you hear?

Here I am. Send me.

Lord we confess
our deafness to your invitation
to be a people open to doing things differently,
responsive to taking risks, to 'getting close to the fire'

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
grant us your peace.

Sisters and brothers in Christ:
Let us not be anxious or timid.
We are a forgiven people,
freed to play our part in the conversion and humanization
of our community, beginning with the church herself
Thank you, Lord.

The Peace

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Insights about Danger and Mission in Being Christian

“It is dangerous to be close to Jesus, it threatens to set us afire, to consume us. And only in the face of this danger does the vision of the kingdom of God that has come near in him, light up”

Johann Baptist Metz

The modern human being is in a process of fuller personality development and of a growing discovery of his and her own rights. But the Church is entrusted in opening up to people, the mystery of God.

In doing this, it opens up to them, the meaning of his and her own existence, the innermost truth about themselves.

Vatican II, The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes, 41

Ephesians 3:1-3, 7-12

This is all about the breadth and diversity of the plan of God and the church's role within in it. The church is constituted to embody in its life the inclusion of diversity. That is what the church is for. Does anyone care? The author suggests that it does or should matter to 'the powers'. Imagined as demonic forces lurking behind the evils of the day or themselves embodied in the instrumentalities of governmental and private power, the authorities and rulers everywhere need to know and experience that this is what this community is about (3:10). It is not there to play chaplain to established order, but to embody the God who breaks down barriers and challenges vested interests which builds on forms of elitism and supremacy at the expense of others.

³This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words. ⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the

news of the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Matthew 2:1-12

Through the rich imagery of this account of Jesus' birth, a statement is being made about Jesus' ministry and the church: the gospel is to be taught to all: it is colour-blind, culture-blind, gender-blind and class-blind. As in the subtle additions to his genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17) which break the pattern by naming women who have been under a cloud, outsiders in every sense, so here Matthew wants us to see the deeper significance of the story. This is a celebration of *inclusiveness*. Those who stand in Israel's tradition are to kneel alongside the Gentile magi in acknowledging that something recognisably divine meets us here.

²In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,² 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." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶'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.'" ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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."

⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn TiS 278

O what a gift, what a wonderful gift!
Who can tell the wonders of the Lord?
Let us open our eyes, our ears and our hearts:
it is Christ the Lord, it is He!

In the stillness of the night when the world was asleep,
the almighty word leapt out;
he came to Mary, he came to us,
Christ came to the land of Galilee,
Christ our Lord and our King.

O what a gift, ...

On the night before he died it was Passover night,
and he gathered his friends together;
he broke the bread, he blessed the wine;
it was the gift of his love and his life –
Christ our Lord and our King.

O what a gift, ...

On the hill of Calvary the world held its breath,
for there for the world to see
God gave his Son, his very own Son
for the love of you and me,
Christ our Lord and our King.

O what a gift, ...

Early on that morning when the guards were sleeping,
back to life came he;
he conquered death, he conquered sin,
but the victory he gave to you and me,
Christ our Lord and our King.

O what a gift, ...

Some day with the saints we will come before our Father
and then we will shout and dance and sing,
for in our midst for our eyes to see
will be Christ our Lord and our King,
Christ our Lord and our King.
O what a gift, ...

Pat Uhl (Howard) 1967, American Catholic Press
Source: Together in Song, Harper Collins Religious (2006)
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Preaching

Prayers for Offerings

Prayers of the People

Hymn TiS 305

Let earth and heaven combine,
their voices all agree,
to praise in sings divine
the incarnate deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made Man.

Unsearchable the love
that has the Saviour brought;
the grace is far above
our own or angels' thought:
enough for us that God, we know,
our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
widest extremes to join;
to bring our vileness near
and make us all divine:
and we the life of God shall know,
for God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
and sanctified by grace,
we shall from earth remove,
and see His glorious face:
then shall His love be fully showed,
and we shall then be lost in God.

Charles Wesley 1707-88 alt.

Words out of copyright

Source: Together in Song, Harper Collins Religious (2006)

Blessing

You have come to us as a small child,
but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,
the gift of love eternal
Caress us with Your tiny hands,
embrace us with Your tiny arms
and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ

Postlude



Liturgist and Preacher: Rev'd Dr Geoff Dornan

Organist: Mary-Anne Neilsen

Readers: Erin and Trey Roady

Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest Ministers

Rev'd Dr Sarah Agnew and Rev'd Dr Geoff Dornan

e-mail: office@wesleycanberra.org.au Website: www.wesleycanberra.org.au