



Feast of Epiphany

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 9 January 2022

READINGS

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7,10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany Light

Anthony De Mello in his book: - "The Song of the Bird" tells the story of a neighbour who found Nasruddin on his hands and knees. "what are you searching for, Mullah?" - "my key" replied Nasruddin. Both men got on their knees to search. After a while the neighbour ask - "where did you lose it - over in the dark alley - Why are you looking here the neighbour ask- because the light is much better here."

One of the most annoying things for us - are the continues loadshedding - especially at night. In our homes we always make sure we have candles or rechargeable lights in case of loadshedding.

We need light to find our way.

ISAIAH 60:2 - tells us that without the light of God's presence - "Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples." Note - its not just any darkness but thick darkness. So dark that you cannot see your hand in front of your face. A darkness that makes it impossible to find one's way.

Have you ever felt that way?

Our society is fragmented and fragmenting at an alarming rate. We sometimes look around and despair that things are not going so well. We see darkness all around us. The unemployed are crying out for work - others are crying out for justice - for security - for hope. Our world is covered in darkness. There is an increasing darkness in our country as we observe more and more problems.

In our first reading from Isaiah, the prophet uses language of light and hope to give hope to the people of Israel. About 70 years earlier, the tribes of Israel had been conquered by the Babylonian Empire and taken into exile. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the Israelites were allowed to return back to their homeland. At first, they returned with great enthusiasm and joy, but - it didn't work out the way they expected. Rebuilding the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem was much harder than they expected. For years and even decades, they'd looked forward to returning home, and then life was just as hard once they got there.

Into that gloomy - dark situation Isaiah writes: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." He's calling them to get over being discouraged, to see the possibilities God has for them, to rebel against the darkness. He's reminding them that they have hope. These words remind us of Isaiah 9:2: - "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light - those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined.

Of course, you and I know that this light is not a thing but a person.

The son of God himself. – we were reminded of this truth two weeks ago in John’s gospel: - In Jesus was life and that life was the light of all people” – the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it”.

John tells us that the light is Jesus. This is the light of which the prophet Isaiah spoke. Jesus is the true light. Isaiah prophesied in verses 3 and 6: “Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. All Sheba will come bearing gold & incense and proclaiming praise to the Lord”.

Here we see the rich meaning of the feast of the epiphany – that we observe today.

The feast of the Epiphany is the day the Church remembers the visit of the Magi or the Wisemen. So it is natural to see a connection with the passage from Isaiah 60. The arrival of nations and kings – bringing gifts of gold and frankincense – SEEMS like a foreshadowing of the story of Matthew chapter 2. But a deeper connection with the Magi – is the theme of light.

For the Magi or the Wisemen – it was a star’s light that caught their attention. We do not know what was in their hearts, what they felt, longed for, or dreamed. What we know is that once they saw it, they decided to see where it was leading, and they set off on their journey. They did not know where it would take them, but they did not hesitate. Their focussing on that light is what put everything else into motion.

They knew it was significant and by following it they were able to discover the greatest news the world has ever known – and that is – that the infant King would save the world. Looking at a star, they saw God’s light breaking into the world, and they dared to believe it. These people from far away, these outsiders, saw what the local rulers didn’t understand. They dared to imagine the promise was true: the Messiah—the saviour—had come.

There are also a great example of hope. Think about what kind of imagination and hope it would take to travel following a star hoping there’s a king at the end of their journey. We too today need to follow the light of Hope that God has given us through Jesus. We too need to recognise and follow the light of Hope that this pandemic will end soon. A hope that should brighten our days and give us cause to be joyful – that our lives will return to some sort of normalcy soon, free from fear of this virus as we begin this new year.

Let us allow Christ’s Epiphany to be our personal epiphany as we come to realise that true HOPE comes through Him. And as we follow the light that shines forth from His love – let us reflect that light in our world and become light to others – who seek Him - this week and throughout this season - of Epiphany, dare to imagine what God’s kingdom looks like among us. Everything we do is built on hope, on hope that does not disappoint.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Amen.