

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

The Feast of Epiphany

Sunday 2nd January 2022

We observed the star at its rising...

Wise Ones seek Jesus and at the start of this story we know more than they do. We know what they don't know that the answer to the question where - that Jesus is born in...

Wise men come from the east, probably astrologers – as far away from Judaism than you can get.

They have observed the star. They have seen it rise.

They have used their knowledge of astrology and have trusted it to the extent that they have taken this long journey following the star – to find out where it leads, to discover the child born to be king of the Jews.

This story is such a combination of human wisdom and divine revelation, of the light that shines, the openness of a few to see it, and the trust to follow it and keep searching.

This story undermines the constructs we often put up of a difference between sacred and secular, of the bible and human wisdom.

The wise ones' knowledge of science took them all the way to Jerusalem and then the scribes' knowledge of scripture gets them to Bethlehem where they are overwhelmed with joy as they encounter the Divine in the Christ child.

To these outsiders is God revealed reminding us that God's light and love is for all people.

I wonder what wisdom and knowledge you trust?

How do you discern what to follow?

There are so many different opinions and views about our world and what it means to be a human being on this planet.

There is wisdom in human knowledge.

The search to understand leads us part of the way.

The openness to observe the star of light, to observe and to notice and be open to new understanding is the quest of humanity to find meaning and depth in life.

It is the experience of God's love, the experience of wonder that takes us the rest of the way, to wonder and gaze at the Christ child and behold him as the God who is with us in human form.

In these challenging days I wonder whose voices you trust, who you turn to, to make sense of this world and observe the light of God in our midst.

God still comes to be with us is revealed to all of us, in worship, in prayer, in the scriptures and is revealed in everyday experiences.

When I think of the wise ones of today, and whose wisdom I draw on it is people who encourage me to a more enlarged understanding of what it means to be human. There is a concern for the other. It is the simple but deep things of love and hope and kindness.

I think of Desmond Tutu who died this week was a wise one indeed.

He was born in 1931 in South Africa, at a time when blacks and whites were kept rigidly apart, and when black Africans weren't allowed to vote.

His epiphany moment, the moment of revelation happened to him as a child. One day as a child he was out walking with his mother when a white man tipped his hat to Desmond's mother as a mark of respect. The young boy had never seen a white man show this kind of respect for a black woman before. His mother told him the man was a priest. This was Desmond Tutu's epiphany moment.

Out of this revealing episode grew the conviction that he did not have to put up with discrimination as well as the belief that religion could help promote equality between whites and blacks.

This led him to pursue the idea of a rainbow nation and strived for healing between peoples. He saw that there could be no future without forgiveness and that apartheid had to end.

Through his quest for equality and all the difficulties and struggles he was a man who was full of joy.

When recognised for his contribution he remained humble even to the extent of requesting a cheap wooden coffin for himself.

He pointed to the depths of what God's love found in flesh, what living together as God's people could look like, an acceptance and respect of the other – that God's love is for all people and is with all people and that is what he lived.

He said: *“We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich,*

poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family.”

Tutu grew in wisdom and depth because of his own spiritual practise of spending time in God’s presence, an hour a day, a day a month and a week a year even when he was Archbishop in South Africa.

The wise ones followed the star, they were open to see the light shining in the dark, a future opening up.

My prayer for you this Epiphany that you may be open to the ways that God is revealed to you and to keep following that star trusting that God’s love will be revealed to you, that God’s hope and joy will carry you through and enlarge your sense of yourself, our God and how we belong to each other.

Epiphany

It might have been just someone else’s story,

Some chosen people get a special king.

We leave them to their own peculiar glory,

We don’t belong, it doesn’t mean a thing.

But when these three arrive they bring us with them,

Gentiles like us, their wisdom might be ours;

A steady step that finds an inner rhythm,

A pilgrim’s eye that sees beyond the stars.

They did not know his name but still they sought him,

They came from elsewhere but still they found;

In temples they found those who sold and bought him,

But in the filthy stable, hallowed ground.

Their courage gives our questing hearts a voice

To seek, to find, to worship, to rejoice. *Malcolm Guite*