



***Epiphany of the Lord.***

***Isaiah 80: 1-6 Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6 Matthew 2: 1-12***

This reading from Isaiah is one of the loveliest poems in the many poems that are recorded in scripture. The images unfold as dawn flushes the morning sky with light. Rise in splendour! You are coloured by the light of God's radiance. What more reassurance do we need that we are truly the beloved of God.

And not only are we blessed, but we are a light source for others. We can direct others to God by the radiant overflow of our hearts. The image of God that we reflect is one of warmth, light and hospitality.

Epiphany means the showing forth of the presence of God. Matthew tells the story of the wise ones, astrologers, stargazers: "We saw the rising of the star- we have come searching."

What can we learn from this ancient tale? Some of the symbols may speak to us at the beginning of this new year as we continue our task of becoming better disciples. To see the rising of the star means to be watchful. When did we last look up at a starry sky? We need quiet times to be more in tune with the world around us. God speaks to us in creation. It is like a great prayer book that is always open, revealing day after day, the glory of God.

The wise ones; those whose life experience has been shaped by births and deaths, by joy, grief, loss and ecstasy, these are like sweet walnuts in gnarled shells. Such people can lead the way even into unexpected places and among strange people. The gift of discernment is a treasure which all in the community can live by.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh, these are the gifts of Epiphany. Gold is discovered through hard work. It may be mixed with impurities that make it hard to recognise. Our gold may need refining before its true worth can be appreciated. We may overlook the gold in others because we do not look with care or because we assume none is present. Gold is the colour of holiness according to the ancient artists who tried to show us how Godness was present in people by placing them in a cloud of gold.

Frankincense, is the resin from a tree, part of its life force, once it was the indication of Benediction, now it wafts from shops in malls. Wherever the source, incense is the symbol of prayer. The gift of incense calls us to prayer to bring fragrance to the world through our movement through saving and savouring.

Myrrh is also a gift of the earth. As a perfume it was associated with death and burial. The gift of myrrh reminds us that life is fragile, that our death, whenever it

comes is a transformation. "...life is changed, not taken away," as Paul reminds us. We are called to live life to the full, celebrating our daily dyings and risings.

Part of this celebration is the recognition that all life has value particularly human life so the gift of myrrh reminds us to do no violence. Our God, is a God of Life, any loss of human dignity by anyone effects us all.

Isaiah describes a great procession moving towards the holy mountain; a procession that is made up of all peoples. These are our kin. The kingdom of God encompasses all in love.

Let us begin the year with hope. Let us pray for strength to work towards creating one people reflecting the diversity of God's grace.

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