

Sermon 1 – January 14: What epiphany?

1 Sam 3:1-10 – calling Samuel (& Eli)

1 Cor 6:12-20 – your body is a Temple of the HS

John 1:43-51 - Jesus calls Philip & Nathanael

The Christmas wrapping paper has long gone out in the rubbish, the family have left for beaches or to home. Perhaps you've been away and now you are back home. Another Christmas and New Year celebration is over. The peaceful time of early January is coming to an end. Many returned to work last week, and more go back next week. Rosemary will be in the office again tomorrow. Life begins to return to its usual patterns.

We contemplate our expanding waistlines and turn to face the coming year. Perhaps we feel a bit jaded and a tad disappointed. All that work, all the build-up and too quickly it is gone.

It's the same in the church. The season of Christmas is over. If you look on the front of your Fisherfolk this morning, you will see that it says 14 January 2018 – second Sunday of the Epiphany. What does that mean? What is the Epiphany?

One answer is that Epiphany is a feast in the calendar. It is January 6, the day we celebrate that the wise men finally made their way to Jesus. It is the day when they acknowledged the new king who had come into the world, and presented him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Or as the Dictionary says in one of its two meanings for Epiphany: it is the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, as represented by the Magi.

What happened to our celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany you might wonder?

Wonder indeed! It got a bit lost for us here – falling in that holiday time after Christmas and New Year, in summer holidays. We hardly saw the wise men this year. Perhaps we could have seen them last Sunday. Instead we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus, one of the options of the day.

If we had lived in another time, we would have found that the Epiphany was a more important celebration than Christmas – which only relatively recently has grown in popular culture, assisted no doubt by its commercial potential.

If we lived in other parts of the world, we could have celebrated the feast of the Epiphany differently. If you look up on line, you will find a Daily Mail report on the Orthodox Church epiphany celebration.

Youtube clips show a group of solemn bearded priests, in full vestments walking across the snow. They head towards an outdoor congregation – dressed for the weather in padded parkers and fur trimmed hats. Hands are stuffed in pockets or thick gloves. The crowd parts as the procession with crucifer draws near. Then chanting begins, a cross is blessed, and the camera pans towards a group of semi-naked men – who dip themselves in the icy water.

That would be enough to wake you up!

But you might argue, it is not January 6 and we haven't been hearing about the wise men this morning. Why then is it the second Sunday of the Epiphany?

It's because our church calendar provides us with more than just one day to celebrate the Epiphany. There's not just the feast day on January 6, but there is a whole season! The season of Epiphany goes from just after Christmas until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It's a season of 4 to 9 weeks, depending on when Easter falls. This year, Ash Wednesday is on 14 February. Epiphany ends on Monday 12th.

It's a far longer season than Christmas – why's that? why so many weeks of this season?

It seems that a case is being built for Jesus, or perhaps that we are slow to understand and need the evidence of multiple people to understand who Jesus is.

The wise men see the star in the East, and travel to find him. They are looking for a king – and they find a baby in a manger. Still a king. They bow down and worship him. We have found him: He is God.

Last week we remembered the baptism of Jesus, hearing again the heavenly affirmation: 'This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.' Yes, again: here he is – He is God.

The wedding at Cana comes also into this season, when the wine has nearly run out at the banquet, and Jesus is convinced to perform his first miracle –to turn water into wine. It is a miracle! He must be the Son of God.

Today we hear about the calling of Philip and Nathanael. Nathanael exclaims: 'Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Yes, he must be the Lord!

The second dictionary definition of epiphany is a moment of sudden and great revelation or realisation – an illuminating discovery. So often that is what happens in these stories of people who encounter Jesus.

In Epiphany we hear about lives that are changed for ever. People who walk away from fishing nets, who travel for months, who encounter miracles.

This is another miracle – perhaps a greater one than the birth of a baby. It is the miracle of God's ability to call us and our willingness to follow.

Epiphany calls us to move away from being passive recipients of a gift – even if it is a really special gift. It calls us like the first disciples to be part of the story of God. We are swept up into God's will which will mean something different for each one of us. For some of us it will be small things, and for others it will be to great things. Some are called to leave home, and some are called to stay.

Jesus comes to us today too - through physical bodies: through ears that listen, like Samuel. Through eyes that see and

understand. To people who are open and alert and prepared to receive.

Poet Mary Oliver writes –
Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention
Be astonished
Tell about it.

Sounds like Philip!

Like the wise men, we might choose to go home by another way.
Rather than the way of disillusionment or apathy, we can choose a road of wonder and attention. We might hear a voice calling to us, that we also might say Here is God.

Like people in Russia, we might plunge deep into God – into a new baptism of the spirit awaiting us in lake or garden.

Pay attention: God comes and speaks to us in a myriad of ways.
Through people and circumstances and dreams. Be astonished.

Like Samuel, we might say: Speak, Lord, your servants are listening.

What is Epiphany? What is Epiphany but God's call and revelation to us again and again. God who calls us can be counted on to create us as people who don't just listen, but are astonished and are able to follow.

Amen.