

## WELCOME 5 January 2020 – Epiphany '20 A

### EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT SHINES

Matthew 2:1-12 & Isaiah 60:1-6

Good morning! Happy New Year! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship.

A-ha!...Eureka!...By jove I think she's got it!

However we say it...it's that moment we finally get it! We finally see our way through a homework problem. We finally see how the puzzle fits together. We finally get that last thing to fit in the suitcase or cupboard. The last box is finally unpacked & we find that last lost thing...ok not yet on that one for us.

It's called an Epiphany...the light clicks on, the penny drops...We see with clarity & insight...There's a sudden recognition/realization/revelation...& everything is clear, reoriented & transformed.

What if that could happen for you every day? What if you could live 2020 with 20/20 vision? What if you really could live 365 days with sheer purpose...on purpose? What would it take for you to live every moment with intention, as if you just had an epiphany? What would it take for you to **BE** an epiphany...a revelation of the light & life & love of Christ to those around you?

We'll explore and experience that together today as we continue to celebrate the coming of Christ...the light of the world...God's love for the world...and especially for you.

Let's pray...

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

The God who breathed this world alive

And sustains it day by day

Whose hands flung stars into space

And controls our destiny...Says,

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, & the glory of the Lord shines over you."

The God who filled the ocean depths

And set tides on their way

Who caused mountains to be raised up

And rainbows to display...Says,

"the Lord will shine over you, & His glory will appear over you.."

The God who made the fertile earth

And seed within to sow

Whose artistry creates butterflies

And the early morning dew...Says,

"Your eyes will shine, & your heart will thrill with joy..."

Father You have loved us from before we were conceived, and your love has brought us to this place today. Bless us in our time together, our worship, in the understanding of your word and in our going out into the world. Through our lives draw others into the arms of your love, so the whole world begins to sing your praises. Through Jesus Christ...Amen

## EPIPHANY '20 A – EVERYDAY EPIPHANY: THE LIGHT SHINES

### FAITH CHAT:

1. How did you welcome 2020? Dodging a wombat...praying for folks we know around here
2. Do you have a particular hope/prayer for 2020? Besides rain...you'd like to see God do

I know I'm not alone in praying 2020 sees the end of days like these & the fires that cause them. A new year sets most of our minds toward the future...whether or not you make resolutions, all of us are able to cast some sort of vision/hope for the new year...Some of us just want a clean slate, fresh start, new beginning...but each of us was able to name a particular hope/prayer for 2020

However that gets expressed/experienced it reveals a longing or desire <sup>w/in</sup> us. We seek something we don't have. We want something different. We are aware of an absence...something missing...in our world or in our lives or in our hearts...there's something not quite right & it's not just drought, fire or smoke that can cloud up or choke out pieces of your life...create an emptiness. Any number of us face challenges or struggles both inside the borders of our own skin & beyond the 4 walls of our homes...And knowing that...these words are hard to hear: *"Arise...Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you."*

When Isaiah wrote these words...ca 700 years before Jesus was born...they weren't just hard to hear, they were shocking...almost beyond belief. The people of Israel heard these words as they were living under the dark cloud of war & the gloomy shadow of exile in Babylon. They were in misery grieving lost loved ones/freedom/city/hopes. Most had resigned themselves to living/dying in captivity far from their homes. And Isaiah has the nerve to show up & say "rise/shine!" Why? Why should they dry the tears of their exile? Why should they rise/shine when everything everything everything had been taken from them? Why? God promised to send a Saviour to deliver them. Isaiah promised that in the pit of their desolation God had not forgotten them or committed them forever to suffering...He would restore. He would redeem. He loved them even as they suffered the just result of their unfaithfulness. That alone was cause for hope...joy...renewal of life according to Isaiah's word from the Father.

Even though we live in a different set of circumstances from those who first heard Isaiah's promises...storms & shadows, gloom & doom still fill our world & some days our lives. Trials & troubles still assail us. Wars & rumours of wars still paint the headlines. How hot was it yesterday? How much rain did you get? But what we know, & Isaiah's audience didn't: that promise has been kept. That redemption has happened. That restoration that forgiveness that new life has been granted.

The magi stand before Herod asking, *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, & we have come to worship him."* These astrologers, fortune tellers, court advisers (not kings in the strict sense) arrive in Judea having travelled for months in pursuit of a "star" in the sky...heavenly occurrence so they know something is up. But look at the question: *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, & we have come to worship him."* That's not an "information" question. They really aren't asking for directions like "turn on Gidgee & look for the ceramic cat by the mailbox."

For them this is personal...compelling...all-encompassing...gut-level & heart-deep. It's a question of devotion...of searching for "the thing" you've been hoping for & waiting for... "the thing" that's been missing all along & you only just now figured out what it is. I don't think that's the only way to ask nor are they the only ones to ask that question. Where is the One who calls to my deepest longing? Who promises to meet my deepest need? Heal my deepest hurt? Help me get through this one? We ask that question in hospitals, in nursing homes around family tables about failing health & faltering marriages...crushing emotional issues & wavering faith...renegade children & frustrating parents...disappointing vocations...stuck by circumstances not of our choosing/doing... *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews?..."* We may not use those same words but at some point, in one form or another, we all ask that question. We all want to be assured that the promise of God to remember us & restore us & redeem us & to shine on us is true. And. It. Is. It is.

Look...the incarnation...God taking on human flesh in Jesus is more than glorious angelic choirs – more than ecstatic shepherds cavorting through Jerusalem's streets – more than time-tested carols & families gathered in rows at least once a year – more than presents/feasting/relaxing...more than some TV-ready snapshot of the holy family blissfully gawking at the manger...God becoming one of us in Jesus Christ is about God being willing to experience what it is to struggle & suffer & die as a human, because in Christ, God declares an end to our struggle, suffering & death. God taking on human flesh, our flesh, reveals (is an epiphany of) love so deep, so wide, so high, it is willing to go to any lengths for our sake. All of that is for you!

Why was Jesus born into this world? He was born for you – to be your substitute under the strict demands of God's Law. (Gal 4:5) Why did Mary & Joseph name him Jesus? He came to save people – you – from sin. (Mt 1:21) The magi gave

him gifts... gold frankincense myrrh... They're gifts that point towards the gifts Christ gives you. Jesus lives the life of perfect faithfulness that God requires of us all. He lives that life for us, & for that faithful life, God has made him King...exalted him to the place of highest honour at the Father's right hand...gold Jesus dies to sin instead of us...myrrh. And, Jesus is our Great High Priest who has made a perfect, once-for-all sacrifice so that we can come before God holy & blameless...frankincense. They're gifts for a King, but they're burial gifts...point toward what we receive from Christ in his death/rez/reign. (for us & for our salvation – unto us a child is born unto us a Son is given...every promise Isaiah delivers from the Father is "for you" – my body/blood for you)

Through his faithfulness lived for you & his death to sin offered instead of you, God gives you Christ's righteousness...Christ's permanent Sonship...as your very own. Jesus didn't come to demand something from you; he came to shine light into your darkness – & by his Spirit within you – to make you a beacon of his light & life & love for the world to see. Everything that belongs to Him is yours forever & everything that once belonged to you (your sin) became His forever...And now it is gone forever

In Christ, the Father reaches to the farthest expanse of his world to bring his human creation close to his heart. These pagan mystics are drawn to Christ by the Father & somehow the Magi see beyond the present into the future & in deep faith worship him *Ps 86:9 - All the nations you made will come & bow before you, Lord; they will praise your holy name.* They recognized in this child someone who called to their hearts & were not ashamed to fall on their faces before him. The incredible good news of Epiphany is that Jesus didn't come only to give joy & life & light to the people of Israel; he came for pagan stargazers like the Magi, Roman citizens like the Ephesians; & 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerners like us. Sinners one & all.

Christmas was only 11 days ago, but as you look around, it's easy to wonder if it made any difference at all. The decorations are down, gifts exchanged, joy packed away for another year. But the arrival of the wise travelers, this Epiphany helps us see again even more clearly that this baby came to save you! Rise! Shine! See! Experience again the Son of God shining on you! He has brought you the best gift of all: salvation! Reunion with the Father! Promise of life w/o end & joy w/o limit.

And here's where the story really sets my heart on fire...The magi go to Jerusalem. For all of their astrological/astronomical smarts, they make a common sense error: They assume any king worth their worship is going to be born living in the seat of wealth, power, influence & glory. They assume the king they're looking for is going to be where every other king is...in the palace...attended by every advantage of kingship...protected & potent even in his crib. They assume Christmas is going to be ready for Instagram...everything picture perfect polished & posed. There is a delightful innocence about their search because they seem to assume that everyone there will both know about & be excited about what they have somehow discerned from their astronomical/astrological calculations.

But they ultimately have to go to Bethlehem...where in a humble house, in a second-class suburb, in poverty & humility they find a toddler & a couple of still-awestruck parents...but they also find that this child is a shock to the system. The current King has no clue that the true king is out there somewhere in nappies & the religious folks who should have known & should have been overjoyed didn't give a fig...Quoted Micah & went back to sleep as far as I can tell.

That's where we come into the story again...We are the real, living, walking, talking fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. That kind of love for us in Jesus ought to drop us to our faces in worship like those travelling pagan stargazers...it ought to compel a whole-life response...it ought to make our hearts beat faster & our backs stand straighter & our hands work harder & our lips open more readily...so that the nations around us...the people who populate the small part of the world we inhabit...can see & be drawn into that light/love/life in Christ...God taking on human flesh in Jesus transforms our place in this world...Every. Day.

Because of Jesus Christ born for you living in you at work through you by the Spirit...You can live every moment with intention, as if you just had an epiphany. You can **BE** an epiphany...a revelation of the light & life & love of Christ to those around you. And I guarantee you already know how...like this...

**Who has been a light in your life, shining brightly with the love of Jesus?**

**What is one thing you could do to begin intentionally letting Jesus' light shine through you more brightly in 2020?** to multiply joy – to bring reconciliation – to bless with Christ's love – to forgive – to give...you've experienced it through someone else what do you need to do to widen the embrace of Christ's kingdom?

Let's pray... Lord Jesus take over. Take all of me & all that I have for your kingdom. You alone are my hope, my future, my security, my peace & my joy. Use my life so that many more may be drawn to your feet to worship you as their King. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amem.