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Dear Friends

The Epiphany of our Lord; Mathew 2 1-2, Isaiah 60 1-6

Today is one of great celebration, the Day of Epiphany, which points us to the manifestation or revealing of the incarnate one, the word made flesh. The light that has come into the world, which has the power to transform and restore all people. A beautiful mystery which always intrigues us, delights us, inspires us and completes us.

Looking for the light that shines in the darkness whilst we live through a pandemic is a journey which bridges every age gap and connects each and every one of us worldwide. Today we journey with an indeterminate number of so called wise men, the Magi, astrologers – said to be from the east.



These men who study the heavens have seen a significant event in the history of all people. They begin their journey seeking the King of the Jews; they are searching for meaning just as we search for meaning. In Matthews's gospel they are summoned by Herod - surely a King would be in a Palace, but he is not there. Herod makes his request and they leave undeterred as they continue, guided by the light, carrying their gifts, until they come to an unexpected place where they enter into his presence. They bow down in the presence of the Infant king, a king who welcomes all peoples of all nations; one who will later command us to make disciples of all nations to continue that which he will begin; the Shepherd who will nurture, guide and protect his flock, gently leading those with young with compassion and mercy.

We know little about these men. We don't know for sure what they saw or what they longed for, or what their hopes and dreams were, but once they saw the light they decided to follow to seek it out and allowed themselves to be led by it. So they set off on their journey with no idea where it would lead. Today we are reminded of this as we journey to look forward to the light, no matter how dim it may seem.

The prophet Isaiah reveals to us that 'through the darkness a light will come'. As sure as a new day dawns following the night, so the light will break forth, so "Arise no longer, look down at your feet but raise your head to the heavens". The prophet goes on to reassure us that when we look to the light our hearts will delight, sing praise, and all nations will come to him from every corner of the earth, gifts will be placed at his feet and, when this comes to pass, all will praise the lord.

These words remind us that in times of darkness or exile there is always light on the horizon. God's light has come and those who walk in it will positively glow because the light has transformational power to move us from despondency and despair to hope. Words that penetrate our hearts today.

In these beautifully poetic writings we see that something new has broken through, something totally unexpected, a radical love that is beyond belief in a world which has almost forgotten, a world covered in darkness has the dawning of new light. But, just like those who came out of exile, it isn't going to be all plain sailing. There will still be difficulties, but God says throughout the ages "I am with you".

Through the scripture we see a dispersed people coming from all corners of the world to acknowledge and pay homage to the incarnate one. Firstly, the Shepherds, despised by many, and now the Magi. We, too, are a dispersed people currently isolated from each others' physical presence as we find ourselves again locked down but today we are reminded that the light has come; dispersed people brought together by a babe and the promise of the one who is God with us - Emmanuel. We look to the heavens for guidance, for a sign, and the one light that shines above the rest, and we are invited to observe and to follow.

The darkness can be consuming but it is not the reality. Light always overcomes it even if it doesn't feel like it at times. When we reflect and think back we remember times when the light in our own lives has broken through, and it is through these moments that we gain strength and courage. We may recall our own 'mini epiphanies', the times when something called us onwards and moved us to a new place, and we feel God's presence in a different and new way.

The Magi see they are part of a bigger story. Perhaps that is why they kept looking upwards and didn't give up? Our faith is like that – trusting beyond what we can see and not knowing what lies ahead, totally reliant on God. This is where we find ourselves as we try to come to terms with the pandemic and journey beyond it. It's not straightforward and, like the wise men, we too have to find a different route home. We cannot follow the old path and so we look to the light which will guide us on a new path, a different way of living, a dispersed people, a changed people. The night sky may look different but we have the light to guide us, a light that can lead us all to new life bringing hope and peace into our darkened skies.

Love in Christ

Belinda

P.S Thanks to all of you who sent cards and gifts. My Christmas card money was donated to Caritas Choir who are fundraising for The Samaritans this year.

I offer you a poem from the Iona community for reflection and meditation.

Gifts

We met in a hall of stars
Talking, night after night,
Pointing, plucking at sleeves, parchments, charts.
Gestures of old men
Who sense at last their studious devotion might
Lead beyond themselves.
And in the night sky, the star waited, consuming us.

Our gifts were chosen lightly, easily decided,
Certain of our quest, impatient
To pursue a lifetimes vision.

Gold, we said. Kingship, Wealth,
Essence of all treasure of earth and heaven.
Incense of priesthood. That too
Easily chosen. Precious, prayerful,
Drifting in the clouds of fragrant longing
Between man and God.
King and Priest we knew that.
The star spoke of it, sang the words
O us in the throbbing darkness as we travelled.
But myrrh? We brought it wondering, troubled.
Not understanding the compulsion
That sealed those precious vials in their casket.

So, we journeyed, and in the early days
Excitement like youth compelled us.
At night we scoured the skies
Tracing the great procession of the stars
And our star, his star, moving westward
Urging us forward.

As Days, weeks, passed,
So these treasures in our arms
Gathered into a heaviness.

Gold: the weariness of government.
Imperial power: despot, tyrant,
Crazed with its compulsion, while
Usurpers lodged secretly within the corners of the mind.
And the lure of wealth
And its devouring lust.
Frankincense, clouded
With unnumbered prayers
And longings of humanity. Our guilt
And failings. The yearning of devotion.
The barren mystery of unanswered prayer.

It grew too dense
To carry in my arms, beneath my cloak,
And so my poor breast stumbled
Under its weight.

Myrrh, in its consecrated chest,
Was carried last among us,
With swaying tiredness. The helplessness
And dread of our mortality,
Mourning and pain and loss.
Our fragile Longing also
That embalmed body
Might somehow carry the spirit beyond death.

Strange gifts to bring child. A baby
Whose wondering hands touched
And received Them.

We gave him all
Our hapless heaviness,
Returning lightened, on a road, a journey,
Altogether different.

Janet Killeen 2020