

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY YEAR A
27 January, 2008

1. **Matthew's gospel** was addressed to a community or communities of Jewish Christians who were living amongst gentiles some of whom were christian, and struggling for survival in a hostile environment. A close look at his gospel reveals the importance of these circumstances. He is at pains to indicate the fulfillment in Jesus of prophecy, and the indications even then that the messiah was to be a light for all people, the saviour of the whole world.
2. **In Matthew**, Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee of the Gentiles and is therefore intended for all people, citing Isaiah 9.1-4 as a prophetic reference. Matthew has Jesus making his home in Capernaum, in Galilee of the gentiles, calling the fishermen from the Sea of Galilee and beginning his ministry there with people coming to him from Galilee, the Decapolis (10 gentile cities east of Jordan) as well as from Jerusalem and Judea. His ministry of calling disciples, teaching, proclamation, and healing was for all people—a sign to the Matthean communities that Jesus' ministry was for Jew and Gentile alike, for all the world.
3. **In Galilee, Christ began a mission for the whole world**, a mission which the Church continues today. Do we always see the purpose of our Churches this way? Sometimes our vision is too small and we forget the universal nature of our mission. We can limit our church by seeing the building, services and ministries as being only for Anglicans. We can forget that we should be calling others by inviting them to worship, to hear the gospel, to Lenten studies and social events. We don't share our faith but keep it to ourselves. We give tokens to missionary agencies, we ignore the rest of the world. We fail to evangelise our children and our neighbours. We ignore those in our neighbourhood and the global village crying out for help and healing. When we are aware of our universal mission, our vision expands beyond the small group who gather on Sundays, beyond ourselves, and we begin to reach out to the world around us, our neighbourhood and to the far reaches of the earth. Then we see the great purpose of Christ in the salvation of the world and the exciting adventure in mission which is ours.

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD YEAR A
6 January, 2008

1. **Today the season of Christmas ends** with the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord, a time to celebrate the light of Christ shining in the darkness of this world. It is traditionally associated with the legend of the magi, astrologers or sorcerers who came to pay the Christ-child homage and perhaps to lay before him in obedience the instruments of their dark craft. The story of the magi appears only in Matthew and for the Jewish Christians of Matthew's community it contained signs from their Scriptures that Jesus, indeed, was the Messiah.
2. **This story carefully combines elements important to Jewish people:** that Jesus came from the line of David; that he was born in Bethlehem near the end of the reign of Herod the Great who feared losing his throne; that the East was a source of wisdom; that the star was a symbol of the Messiah. By a series of signs the child was manifested as the epiphany or revelation of God in the world. The gold and frankincense of Isaiah 60. 1-6 and Psalm 72 may have influenced the writer of the gospel, and the camels may have influenced our popular understanding of the magi's mode of travel! (Notice camels are not in the narrative.)
3. **Christ's life was a series of epiphanies:** in Birth, Baptism, Transfiguration, in bringing sight to the blind and healing to the lame, in calming the storm, and of course in death, resurrection and ascension, and at Pentecost. So today the importance of our celebration is theological rather than historical.
4. **Like Paul in Ephesians 3.1-12** we rejoice in the mystery of the revelation of God in the world and the inclusion of all people in God's salvation. It's relevant today in a world where God sometimes seems hidden by the darkness of mankind's lack of humanity. Look for signs of the revelation of God in the darkest of situations; in the light and hope given in times of fear and despair; in compassion and mercy and forgiveness and practical aid; in times of insight and awareness of the presence of God with us. Perhaps you have had an epiphany yourself—a time when God has been revealed to you in a special way, a time when darkness covered you until Christ brought light and hope into the situation. Look for these times of revelation to you in your suffering and your darkness. May you know the light of Christ in your life. May that same light of Christ 'signal the dawn of justice and peace, and beckon all nations to walk as one ...' (The Prayer of the Day)

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD YEAR A
13 January, 2008

1. **It is often asked**, ‘Why was Jesus baptised when he was sinless? The writer of Matthew 3.13-17 makes it clear that Jesus’ baptism is an epiphany, a revelation of the true nature and identity of Jesus. From this very beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, the writer points to the servant nature of Jesus. John would have prevented Jesus’ baptism, but Jesus’ reply indicates that submission was part of his role, a submission which we see in his ministry to the poor, the outcast, to women, a submission we see in his taking the towel, and his submission to death on the cross, so that God’s love could be revealed. The vision of the dove and the voice from heaven confirmed to Jesus that he was on the right path, the path of service and servanthood.
2. **Isaiah 42.1-9** is the first of the suffering servant passages of the second Isaiah. The early Christians saw these images of the suffering servant reflected in Jesus: the servant/ the Son, my chosen/ my beloved, in whom my soul delights/with whom I am well-pleased—even our English translations show the similarities here. So in the words from heaven, the early readers hear reflections from Isaiah—justice, righteousness, covenant, light to the nations, release of prisoners, the new order being instituted, all achieved through the obedience and suffering of the servant sent by God.
3. **Acts 10.34-43 records one of Peter’s early sermons.** He recognizes that in baptism, Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit and equipped for his ministry. Paul lists a series of acts of God. Jesus’ actions are God’s actions: God was doing good and healing in Jesus’ ministry, God raised Jesus from the dead, God chose the disciples to be witnesses, God gave him the authority to be the one by whom we are judged.
4. **So, we, those who are baptised into Christ, are also called to proclaim God’s revelation in Jesus**, not just the great things God did through Jesus in his earthly ministry, his death and resurrection, but also the great things we know and see today: - his love and compassion to all people, his release of those imprisoned by fear, injustice, poverty, blindness and paralysis, his light of justice and truth. The collects for today declare this truth see APBA p. 527.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY YEAR A
20 January, 2008

1. **Calling and sending are at the heart** of the Christian faith. Indeed God is the one who calls and sends. God is the God of mission.
 - **He called Israel to be his people.** “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49.1-7) . The nation of Israel, the servant nation, was chosen by God to fulfil his mission. Yet such a servant was bound to suffer, the despised one, the abhorred one.
 - **This suffering servant image** came to be used of Jesus. In another part of Isaiah the suffering servant remains silent, ‘like a lamb led to slaughter’. The blood of the paschal lamb of the Old Testament protects and saves the Israelites in Egypt. Paul interpreted Christ as the true paschal lamb. Lambs were offered as a means of atonement for sin. And so John declares that Jesus is the “Lamb of God”, the chosen one, the called one, who would free people from the bonds of sin, and make them one with God. Lamb of God could mean just “Son of God”, the other phrase used in the story. Whichever way it is meant to be read we can see from the context that Jesus is the specially chosen one, called and sent by God. The Holy Spirit testifies to that. (John 1. 29-42)
 - **Jesus reveals himself as one who calls and sends.** ‘Come and see’, he said, and so the men came and saw and then brought others to ‘come and see’.
 - In the same way Paul considered himself ‘called and sent’, as are the other early Christians, the saints. (1 Cor. 1.1-9)
2. **We too are called to ‘come and see’:** to see in the Scriptures the mission of God in Israel and in Jesus and the early Church, to see the Church as a living memory of Jesus and see him at work in the Church in healing, forgiving, gathering and building community, showing love, greeting newcomers, welcoming outcasts, befriending the unloved. And we are then sent to our relatives, friends and neighbours, as those early disciples were, to invite them to come to Jesus’ feet, to come and see for themselves. Calling and sending are at the heart of our liturgy and at the heart of our mission..