

Sunday, January 7th 2024. Epiphany

Isaiah 60.1-6, Psalm 72.10-15, Matthew 2.1-12

In the name of God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

People sometimes tell us, “Open your eyes”, if we are searching for something, which we can’t find, and it is pretty obvious where it is. Our eyes may be opened in other ways, too, when we suddenly see the solution to a problem (that happens to me with crossword puzzles, if I go back a second time and suddenly see the answer), or it may be that we have been admiring someone, say, a celebrity, who turns out not to be as we thought. An eye opener, we may say.

Today is Epiphany Sunday, and Epiphany is all to do with seeing, revelation. We may talk about an epiphany moment, when we see something, which we hadn’t seen before.

In the first reading, a call goes out to rejoice at the appearance of God in his glory, bringing light to his people and drawing the nations to Zion, which is to be restored and beautified. Zion is called to reflect the glory of God, who comes as light to the world and draws the nations to a new dawn. There is a contrast between the darkness of the world and the light, which the people enjoy, recalling the plague of darkness in Egypt in Exodus. The nations will throng to Jerusalem, bringing back scattered Israel, and they will bring their wealth for the beautifying of the temple and their flocks for sacrifice. You can imagine the people of Ukraine longing for the day when the war will be over and their country restored. ‘Lift up your eyes and look around,’ says the call.

In Psalm 72, the new king is the human agent, through whom God’s justice reaches the nation:

‘Give the king your judgements, O God, and your righteousness to the son of a king. Then shall he judge your people righteously and your poor with justice,’

The psalmist prays that the king will be blessed with victory, dominion and wealth. Gifts will be offered by the kings of foreign nations, as we do, when visiting monarchs and presidents of other countries. The places mentioned, as in Isaiah, stand for the remote, foreign and exotic. People’s eyes will be opened.

In the Gospel, the magi were astrologers, probably what we know as astronomers. In Luke’s Gospel, shepherds are chosen for those going to see Jesus. Here, the magi come from a different direction, and the emphasis is also different. Luke paints a picture of Jesus being born in a

stable, shut out and in humble circumstances, which looks forward to his humility as he grows up, and in the story of Simeon and Anna how he will be opposed and the pain, which it will bring to Mary. Here, the magi bring gifts, as in Psalm 72, but now gold for kingship, incense for worship and myrrh for suffering, revealing what will happen during Jesus' life and ministry. Our eyes will be opened. No wonder that Herod is reported as being frightened and not as secure as he thought.

We also learn about the star, a light in the darkness, a leading light. We talk about people being leading lights, people of energy, initiative, those, who serve, people, who open our eyes.

Matthew's portrayal points forward to what is going to happen. Jesus will be revealed as the one, who would transform hatred into love, revenge into forgiveness, hardness of heart into compassion, selfishness and arrogance into service. It would challenge those, who thought that they were strong and invincible. People's eyes would be opened.

This child would invite people to be disciples, to bring the message of light and love to the darkness of the world, as Zion had been called to do.

As we begin that journey, we also shall see a way, which we had never imagined, as we are invited to be the friends of God, to come and see. Then our eyes, too, will be opened, and all will be transformed.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.