

Looking for Light

Matthew 2:1-12

Grace and peace to you. The sermon I am reading today is adapted from a sermon by Pastor Adrian Kitson. Adrian is the pastor at St Petri Lutheran Church, Nuriootpa.

I work in the Pastoral Care Department of the Austin and Heidelberg Repatriation Hospitals. Amongst my colleagues there are 3 Baptists, 2 Anglicans, 2 Catholics, 1 member of the Uniting Church, 1 member of the Churches of Christ, and 2 Lutherans. We are a very ecumenical bunch! And, surprisingly, we rarely argue over doctrinal or theological matters. Except... at Christmas time.

In our storeroom we have a large nativity scene which we lug out faithfully every year and set up at the front of the chapel. It is really beautiful! Once it is set up the discussions begin: "You know, baby Jesus really shouldn't appear in the manger until Christmas Day", and, "You can't put the three wise men in yet – they don't appear until epiphany!" This year a retired Anglican priest wandered through the chapel as we were in the midst of these deliberations. He remarked, "I've always thought that the three wise men should stay as long as possible. They're the ones that remind us that we are all searching for the light. And that we often find it in unexpected places."



That was a small epiphany for us, a realisation of the importance of the role of the wise men – you might call it an epiphany about epiphany!



Epiphany is about light – light being shown in darkness. An epiphany moment is seeing something for the first time or making a great discovery or finally finding the thing or the person or the understanding for which you have been searching all along. I suppose that begs the obvious question. For what have you been searching? What are you looking for and what are you seeking in 2017? Perhaps you seek a change of place, or a change of occupation, to be more generous, more caring; less self-centred. Perhaps you are seeking a sense of peace in the midst of what feels like an increasingly frightening political world scene? Perhaps you are seeking answers to the way forward for St Paul's in 2017?

There is an old Quaker saying: "Do not expect more light until you follow what light you already have". We are not the first, nor will we be the last people to search for something long promised. The Magi searched and searched. These little known Gentile eastern people, either from Iraq, Iran or Saudi Arabia, searched for an event promised, a person promised a long time ago.

They searched in a particular way though. They followed what light they were given. As they followed light that was given, they were given more light. They followed the star of the new king across open country and into the darkness of the crazed king, Herod. They didn't know the full dimensions of Herod's darkness, and they almost contributed to God's promise being snuffed out before it could be fully revealed. Herod conducted his own search. He searched for this long-promised 'new king' he heard the Easterners speak of. He conducted a death search and killed all male children under two years of age in vicinity of Bethlehem. Many innocents were slaughtered that day, and it was dark.



But Light was still present. Those few who kept seeking it and followed it when it was revealed – one moment after the next, one night, one day, another night, another day– to them the Light was given more fully.

Like the Magi, we travel life's way without knowing many things.

We don't really know what will become of us this year.

We don't know how life will go, what crises may come, what wonderful things we will see, great moments we will experience, dark times we might experience.

Yet, just as it was for the Magi, God's light is revealed one moment, one day and night at a time. The Magi call out to us and say, "follow the light you have been given and God's light will shine on your way".

Now, those star-gazers didn't exactly know where to find the new King, but they did seem to trust that in any darkness there actually was light, and they trusted the promises of God that that the One who turns the darkness of sin and death into the light of forgiveness and life was revealing this light in their time.

Now that is a leap of faith. By just knowing the stars, they were being led; but they didn't know God's intentions. Matthew makes it very clear that it was the light of God's Word that filled in the picture for all those involved with the coming of the new King.

It was the Light of his revealed will in his spoken Word that made their journey and their search fruitful and meaningful. Their meaning, purpose, direction and joy did not come from the star they followed, but from the Word they heard about that star. It was only when the Word of promise from the Scriptures was proclaimed that they knew where to find the new King and who this King was – the Light for all humanity, all creation.

And it's the same for us. We live in this light – the light of the good news, the light of the gospel – that the creator of the universe has kept his promise to bring his light into any darkness we experience within and around us by forgiving our sin and freeing us from the tyranny of darkness and death still active in our time.

We didn't make it happen, we couldn't make this happen. We didn't receive light by searching, by choosing, by finding. The light of Jesus' resurrection was revealed to us by God's choosing and by God's means and by God's grace given in this king of Light, and we are right with our God because he made it so. Our confessions of Faith call this "an especially brilliant light" – justification by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake.

So now we have this light of the gospel; and yet, we still live in mystery. There are so many things we are unaware of and so many things about which our understanding is limited.

Well, there is a lot that the Magi probably didn't know either. They probably had no idea of the full scope of this Christ Child and the light he would bring to all people – Jew and Gentile alike.

They probably had no clue that this baby they were eventually led to worship would grow up and be crucified on a cross.

But even if they didn't understand all of life and the many ways of the world, and even if they only saw in part and not yet in full, the thing is that they followed what light was given, and as a result, the light of joy and fulfilment and peace was present in their lives.

They gathered in the presence of the Light and they were overwhelmed with joy because they knew that they were in the light.

They seem to understand that a new reality of reliance on the God's light in Christ, new understanding, true enlightenment, peace and joy come to those who dwell with the Saviour – and they gladly gave their gifts and their lives to him.

The Light we have is blinding. We have open access to the God of all things by faith in his Son, Jesus, and we have confidence in his grace, love, power, strength, wisdom and peace. We are confident that our God keeps his promises and does what he says and gives us enough light for each day – the light of encouragement, challenge, love, instruction, hope, strength for living.

And yet, I sometimes find myself wavering in this confidence. If only I could see what the future holds. If only I could see what God is going to do then perhaps I could relax a bit.

As I reflect and consider the year that has just past, I wonder if there is a feeling of encroaching darkness? I wonder what a Trump government will mean for the world. I wonder what will become of the refugees on Manus Island. I wonder how long our Muslim neighbours will be automatically blamed for every terrorist attack around the world.

A couple of days after Christmas I watched a Christmas message from Brendan Cox, the widower of Jo Cox. You may remember that Jo Cox was a British politician who was assassinated in June last year.

In his message Brendan says,

"Instead of being a turning point for the worse, 2016 could be a wake-up call that brings us back together. A wake-up call for all those of us who thought that the values that feel so much part of our society — of tolerance, of fair play — were in some way sacrosanct and didn't need defending."



God's light is still present among us, shining into the darkneses we face today. Shining into the challenges that Brendan outlines. As you follow the light you have been given, this light will increase in your life and God's great mystery to include all people in his light will happen through you. How will you shine God's light into the darkness this year? How will you show God's unconditional love to those around you? How will you speak words of peace, love and forgiveness into challenging situations? Know that God will light your way, no matter how difficult the path.

There will be light in darkness and the Light will shine into the darkness and eventually, the darkness will be no more.

Amen.

