

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

03 - 09 January 2016

Thought for the Week:

This week our meditations focus on the celebration of Epiphany on 6 January. The word 'epiphany' speaks of a moment of sudden inspiration or insight. The goal of this celebration, and of the Sunday's that follow it, is to take our insight into the incarnate Jesus deeper. To do this, the Lectionary offers two perspectives on Christ. Firstly, in the coming weeks, we will explore the way Jesus was viewed by those around him - John the Baptist, the disciples, the religious leaders, the crowds, and even God. Secondly, we will also be invited to recognise the various ways that God's glory was revealed in Christ. It's one thing to proclaim that God has become human. It's another thing to understand this human being, and to grasp his significance for our world. This is the work of Epiphany.

The Gospel reading for Epiphany, which we will read on Wednesday, is the famous story from Matthew of the magi's visit. This account is a doorway to understand the mission and message of Jesus more deeply. One of the aims of Matthew's Gospel is to convince its readers that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the "prophet like Moses" that the Old Testament promised. But, it also works hard to show that Jesus is a different kind of Messiah from the one the people expected. His mission included both Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, insiders and outcasts. It expanded to embrace the nations, and the whole of creation. Jesus is a Messiah for all. As we begin our journey of understanding Jesus, this is a good, and challenging, place to start.

Sunday 03 January 2016

Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

Reflection: Paul's letter to the Ephesians gives an amazing summary of God's work of salvation. It begins with the awesome affirmation that God loved us even before the universe was created, and that God had planned from the start to fulfil God's purpose for

us and for the created order. This plan is for the entire universe to become one and whole in Christ (vs. 10). This unity and wholeness was first manifest in the way God made Jews and Gentiles one in the new Christian community. Then, in giving us God's Spirit, God filled us with God's life, and showed us that the promise of salvation is real, and that God's plan will come to be. It's amazing to think that everything God does is focussed on this plan of salvation for the universe, and that God invites us not only to know intimacy with God, but to participate in making God's love and life known to the world. It's even more amazing to think of how much God was prepared to sacrifice for the sake of this plan. Stop and reflect on this for a moment.

When we remember that God is at work in our world, and in our lives, to bring about this great, life-giving plan, it puts our struggles in perspective. It also gives us a tremendous sense of security and acceptance. We have no reason to doubt that God's love is infinite, or that we are welcomed into God's family. Our belovedness has been assured since eternity past, and it is assured into eternity future! This is a great reason to celebrate.

How can you stay mindful of God's life and love today, and live with an attitude of celebration?

Practice for Today: The Scriptures constantly call God's people to be mindful and to take note of God's presence and work. This awareness does not come naturally. It takes work, particularly the work of developing our spiritual sensitivity through the practice of stillness and meditation. Today, make some time to be still and reflect on the love and grace of God as they are described in today's reading.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I celebrate you, O God, and wonder at your amazing grace and love.

Monday 04 January 2015

Reading: Acts 7:44-53

Reflection: Last year we visited Stephen's story a few times. We learned how he was chosen to be one of the deacons who were appointed to distribute food so that the apostles could focus on

teaching and prayer. We learned how he was arrested, tried and executed by stoning, making him the first Christian martyr. Today we listen to a small section of the sermon Stephen preached at his trial. These words were responsible for his death. Stephen did not "sugar coat" his confrontation with the religious leaders, and his challenge made them angry, resulting in the sentence of death. But, of course, this sequence of events was an important part of Paul's journey to faith. Stephen's witness sowed a seed into Paul's heart, it seems, which finally bore fruit on the road to Damascus.

In this section of Stephen's sermon the focus is on David's desire to build God a Temple. Although the Temple was finally built, Stephen reminds the religious leaders that God needs no Temple. The reason Stephen points this out is that he had been accused of saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple, and he was addressing the idolatry which had arisen around the building. On Wednesday, as we celebrate Epiphany, we will reflect on how the incarnate One came not just to the Jews, but to all nations. Today, Stephen's declaration that heaven is God's throne and earth is God's footstool is a reminder that God does not fit into our boxes of nationality, religiosity, or locality.

How can you open your heart to embrace the world as God's home, and all people – especially the ones you struggle to love – as loved by God?

Practice for Today: One of the reasons we are called to pray for all nations is because this reminds us that God loves, and is concerned for, all people – not just us. This is the Good News of Epiphany, and the truth that all Christ-followers must embrace. Today, offer prayers for all the suffering and rejected people of the earth.

Breath-Prayer for Today: God of the nations, may your grace and love bring healing to all people who are rejected and suffering.

Tuesday 05 January 2016

Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14

Reflection: The words of today's prophecy from Jeremiah were written to the exiles who had been carried away to Babylon. They are words of promise and restoration. God calls the people to

celebrate because they are going to be returned to their home, and the life they will find there will be peaceful, abundant and just.

Notice two things in this prophecy. Firstly, notice that those who are brought home are not just the wealthy or important, but also the weak and the vulnerable. God's promise is not just for a connected few, but for all. Secondly, notice how the nations are called to witness this restoration of Israel. Although God's people have done nothing to make this happen, their return to their homeland is a witness to the nations. It reflects God's compassion and commitment to God's people, and enables Israel to become – as the nation was always called to be – a people that is blessed to be a blessing. Through them all nations are invited to join the celebration and enjoy the blessing.

Tomorrow's celebration of Epiphany is all about God's blessing being offered to all nations and all people. Those who have already experienced God's call and God's promises are to invite others to experience the same gift. Today, give thanks for the blessings God has given you, and think about ways to share those blessings with others.

Practice for Today: The twin disciplines of thanksgiving and giving combine to give us a sense of abundance, peace and joy. When we take time to recognise all the goodness we enjoy, we can't help but give thanks, and when we give thanks we are reminded of the goodness we enjoy. Then, as we look around us we can't help but seek the same joy for others, which automatically leads us to be generous with our time, talents and treasures. Why not try to experience this virtuous circle for yourself today?

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I thank you, O God, for the blessings I enjoy, show me how to share them with others.

The Epiphany - Wednesday 06 January 2016

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: These "wise men" (or, more accurately, sorcerers) who visited Jesus raise a number of questions for us. To begin with they would never have been permitted to worship God in the Temple. They were Gentiles, and their occupation of divination was forbidden

in the Hebrew law. Yet, they are among the first worshippers of Jesus. Then, there is the curious way they came to Jesus – following signs in the heavens and being led by a star – and how they left – being warned in a dream of Herod's evil intentions. It's interesting how clearly they seemed to hear the "voice" of God, while Herod – the king of God's people – was deaf to the new thing God was doing. This story quickly blurs the lines we like to draw concerning who is "in" and who is "out" from God's perspective.

The message of this story is strong and clear, though. The birth of Christ, although it happened in a hidden corner of the world, was not just a gift to one group or nation. It was a gift to the entire world, and anyone who is willing to listen, to watch, and to be open to God's voice can experience God's grace and love.

How can you be more mindful of God's presence in your life today?

Practice for Today: As the magi show, it is not just the Scriptures that reveal God to us. Sometimes God speaks through the natural world (the ancient Celts called nature the "Second Bible"). Sometimes God speaks to us through other people. The issue is not whether God is speaking. It's whether we're listening. Today, in every person and situation, listen for the voice of God – especially where you don't expect it.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Like the magi, O God, I choose to listen and watch for the signs of your presence.

Thursday 07 January 2016

Reading: Daniel 2:1-19

Reflection: One of the biggest mistakes the people of God made in the early years of faith was to believe that God's presence and purposes were limited by geography and ethnicity. Initially people believed that gods were local, and that when two groups of people clashed, the victory of one group over the other demonstrated the superior power of their god. The Old Testament is full of such perspectives on events. Then, when the Temple was built, the people of Israel began to learn that God was the God of all the universe, but they still believed that God was, in some way, linked to the Temple. So, when the Temple was destroyed and the people

carried into exile, they thought that God had abandoned them, and that they no longer had access to God's presence and power. The prophet Daniel, however, and many of the other prophets of that and later times, proclaimed a different view.

The story in today's reading is dramatic. The king has a dream, and, in order to ensure he gets the correct interpretation, insists that his wise men tell him what the dream was before they explain it. When they can't do it, he orders their execution. But, Daniel, the exiled Hebrew, manages to save himself and the others by fulfilling the king's request. If God's people were in doubt of God's presence, this story would have encouraged them in their faith. But, it would also have expanded their view of God, because in this story it is a pagan king who hears God speak through his dream, and who recognises the significance of what he has seen and heard. Once again the Scriptures invite us to celebrate a God who embraces all and works through all. Notice how concerned Daniel is, not just for his own wellbeing, but that of his Gentile colleagues. This is a Christ-like attitude of love.

Today, find ways to celebrate the God who will not be contained in our categories.

Practice for Today: When we offer our praise to God, we are opening ourselves to new understandings of God's nature and purpose. Today, allow your praise to expand your faith and allow you to recognise that God is not limited by human categories.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, O God, for your love and presence which fills all and embraces all.

Friday 08 January 2016

Reading: Psalm 72

Reflection: Can you imagine a king, a president or a prime minister who fulfilled the requirements of their job in the way that this Psalm describes? As we reflect on the Epiphany celebration we are reminded of one example of a king who embodied the spirit of this song. The magi who came to worship Jesus were powerful men, but they willingly humbled themselves and worshipped the child because they knew that they were witnessing something new in the

world. This king was, in a way that they could not yet comprehend, completely different from any other that had ever lived. Even just the fact that his family would welcome shepherds and foreigners with kindness and gratitude set them apart from much of the exclusive dividedness of their world. Then, when Jesus grew and began to proclaim the Reign of God, his message was all about building a world of peace, justice, equality, prosperity, and love – just as this Psalm describes it.

No king has ever actually created such a world, and no monarch has ever succeeded in leading his or her subjects into such peace. But, as we seek to understand who Jesus was, and what God's Reign is all about, this Psalm gives us a good picture. But, it's more than just a helpful way to understand Jesus. It's also the hope for which we long, pray, and work in our own lives.

How can you participate in ensuring that the poor are treated fairly, the world is abundantly prosperous for all, and the weak and needy are rescued?

Practice for Today: Simple acts of kindness and generosity go a long way to bringing God's justice and peace into the world. Today, try to treat everyone you meet with kindness, forgiveness and generosity. Notice the difference it makes to you and to them.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I dream of a world of peace and justice, O God, may my life reflect that dream today.

Saturday 09 January 2016

Reading: Numbers 24:15-19

Reflection: You'll probably remember Balaam as the prophet to whom God spoke through a donkey. Although God had told him not to go with the messengers from king Balak, he decided to go anyway, largely because of the money he was offered (although, naturally, he chose to believe that God's word had told him to go). King Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites, but no matter how many times and ways he and Balaam tried to curse God's people, they couldn't do it. Instead, Balaam found that he could only speak blessing over them. Today's reading is part of that blessing.

The message Balaam speaks is appropriate for his time. The blessing of a god was always associated with military victory in those days, and so the blessing includes images of various enemies' heads being crushed or cracked. That's how Balaam understood God back then. This is why the coming of Jesus is so important. Jesus revealed that God is not a violent conqueror. Rather, the God we see revealed in Jesus is a divine Lover; seeking to win our hearts, not crush our skulls! In Jesus we are taught the radical truth that even enemies are to be loved. This new Gospel understanding of God is at the heart of Jesus' life and mission – and it's one we cannot avoid if we truly seek to know God through Christ.

Are there any ways in which you still see God as a vengeful, violent conqueror? How does the vision of God that Jesus offers challenge you today?

Practice for Today: One of the most significant things that Jesus taught – and one of the hardest – is the practice of forgiveness. And he set the example when he forgave his executioners from the cross. Today, as you seek to experience the love and grace of God, share it with others – even those you don't think deserve it – through the practice of forgiveness.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you have forgiven and blessed me, O God, so I choose to forgive and bless those who have hurt me.

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