

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians in today's New Testament reading, talks about the work that he has been given. Ephesians 3, verse 8 – he says “my work is to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.”

Paul's work is to reveal the “boundless riches of Christ” and to make known the mystery of God's ways.

Epiphany is the season when we reflect on the Christmas festival, just gone. Not only to unravel and unpack its meaning and significance, but also, to commit our lives afresh to living out its truth.

Christmas is central to the mystery of God's plan. The incarnation is a most remarkable plan from the heart of God. The heart of God that wills and desires that we are all reconnected, and all restored, in our relationship with God, our creator.

The whole of the Bible tells the story of God's incredible patience and persistence to bring this about. Yes, there were earlier plans which involved rules and regulations; but all of that did not achieve what we now understand that the birth of the baby in a manger was able to achieve. By becoming, “like us in every way but without sin”, the baby Jesus, who became the boy Jesus, who became the man Jesus, who became the teacher Jesus. This Jesus reveals to us the full extent of God's love and mercy, compassion and forgiveness, for each one of us.

Jesus does this firstly by his willingness to become vulnerable and dependent like any other baby.

Creator God, becomes created.

All-powerful God becomes a powerless baby.

The all-knowing God becomes limited to time and space.

The God of eternity slips into our earthly reality and chooses to be with us, chooses to be alongside us, chooses to be one of us.

This is the mystery of God's purposes and the boundless riches of Christ – the extent to which God was prepared to go to meet us, where we are, at our point of need, and to restore us and remake us.

The first to greet the baby Jesus were the local lads, the shepherds. And today we commemorate the arrival of the outsiders, the foreigners, those who had travelled huge distances, across borders and across hostile territories. All came to offer homage and worship. Some brought gifts as signs of that worship and homage.

The wise men were seekers after truth. They had no background in the faith tradition of the shepherds. Yet both shepherds, and wise men, were drawn by the miracle babe in the manger. Both also had encounters with angels – with messengers from God - encouraging them on their way.

I wonder how your experiences in life fit with those of the shepherds or those of the wise men?

The shepherds were hard-working, down-to-earth folk, who lived day by day and moment by moment. The wise men were, by contrast, those who loved to study and hypothesize. They conjectured and had theories about all kinds of things. But both shepherds and wise men, equally, found themselves kneeling and honouring the baby Jesus.

So, whether you identify more readily with the shepherds or the wise men, together we are drawn, in awe and wonder, to see the “boundless riches of Christ”, revealed in Jesus.

Together, where heaven meets earth, we open our hearts and minds, as we kneel in worship and adoration.

God has come. God always comes. God comes to you and I, where we are, and reveals himself to us; makes himself known to us.

No personal circumstances are too difficult for Jesus to come. No questions are too difficult for Jesus to answer. No pain is too difficult for Jesus to hold and heal.

Jesus came 2000 years ago and was worshipped by shepherds and wise men. Jesus comes today, into your home and into my home, and we are invited to worship. We are invited to ponder and to wonder. We are invited to be amazed and to be surprised that God comes.

Perhaps we’ve always understood that, somehow, we need to seek God to find God.

However, Christmas tells us that, rather than us seeking God, God comes looking for us. It is God who seeks us out!

The incarnation reveals to us that it is God who travels the distance and is revealed in the culture, in the language, in the style, and in the particularity of each of our circumstances. Here and now, today in this place, in this moment, God comes. He comes in our mind and in our heart. In our desires and our longings and hopes at the start of this new year.

God comes as light in the darkness.

God comes as peace in the storm.

God comes as the baby in the strangest of places. If God can do that, can God not also surprise you, today, in your particular circumstances?

You know what, I really like the wise men. They were unconventional. They were dreamers, and perhaps trusted their intuition even more than their thinking abilities.

You know what, I really like the shepherds. They were faithful, and reliable. They were tough and in-tune with nature. They were down-to earth and perhaps trusted their instincts more than their imaginations.

God has been revealed as the One who came to the mess and political upheaval of first century Palestine.

God is being revealed as the One who comes to the mess and political upheaval of 21st century Britain.

May we each receive our own Epiphany as Jesus is revealed as the one who comes to us in our particular circumstances; our own thoughts, our own feelings, our own questions.

May you, wherever you are, know that God is the one who is seeking you out, to restore you. God comes to you. May you recognise and receive all that God has for you in this new year.

May Epiphany 2021 be for us all a time when we welcome Jesus into the particularity of our homes and our hearts. May we too, like the shepherds and wise men, be found worshipping at the manger throne.

Amen.