

1 John 3: 19

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Matthew 4 verse

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned."^[1]

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

²³ **Jesus** went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom,

and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴ News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,^[a] Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Tomorrow is the celebration of the Epiphany – January the 6th...but you are allowed to celebrate it a day early!

The celebration is the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles as their Saviour – and it's represented by the visit of the Magi to the Mary, Joseph and Jesus (Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 to 12) we often include that reading at the Carol service.

But the celebration of Epiphany can be based around a number of scriptures. The scripture today is more evidence based and focuses on the adult Jesus.

I wonder what kind of mind you have when it comes to discoveries?

Perhaps you are the instant revelation kind of person, you see and hear the evidence and there is a genuine light bulb moment – it all slots into place.

I noticed they put that image in the latest Wallace and Gromit Film....

Maybe you're more cautious than that...for you it's a longer process and a growing discovery. Doubt is a big part of it as well as your character. It takes time to trust

the discovery you are making, it takes time to come to terms with what this means and the impact it might have.

Let's examine the evidence of the author of today's Gospel.

Matthew the tax collector and his sudden calling to follow Jesus.

We have no evidence or writing about what Matthew knew about Jesus before his calling. We have no knowledge of his state of mind or thoughts. In the series "the Chosen", a back story is created and we could hazard a guess that Matthew feels trapped and weighed down by the situation he's found himself in; collaborating with the Romans, cheating and betraying his own people, making a good living at the expense of others.

However, Jesus appears and calls Matthew to follow and he immediately leaves his tax booth and follows Jesus.

So that would suggest someone who can have a light bulb moment. Jesus speaks and Matthew knows this is his moment.

However, we also have Matthew the Author, giving a measured and considered response to the evidence of what he sees Jesus doing.

Matthew has the habit of connecting together ancient Old Testament documents with the evidence of what he sees himself. We heard in our gospel reading that Matthew sees Jesus preaching and healing in Naphtali and Zebulun and recalls the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 9. He also includes a quick resume of all that Jesus did through Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the whole region across the Jordan.

Epiphany then is a response to the evidence in front of you. Whether a sudden revelation or a long slow development. Epiphany centres on Jesus Christ although we use the word to mean other revelations as well. And grasping revelation isn't always easy.

Think about Matthews other epiphany story and he's the only author to include it.

The wise men discover something. They are star gazers. Most likely scholars and academics. A new star appears and they believe it means the birth of a king. They have the wealth and the time and the inclination to follow it. They have no idea where it's going or where they are going. They blunder into Jerusalem and alert King Herod to this threat to his throne. That's a big mistake and only on further guidance do they find Bethlehem and the holy family.

An Epiphany then, might be messy as we work out what God is revealing and who Jesus Christ is.

How does God communicate with you?
Through his word? Through worship songs? Through excellent preaching??? How does what you think God is saying crystallise in your heart and mind?

What might God be saying and doing or trying to reveal to you as this New Year starts???

I believe God desires to be in a constant dialogue with us. Sometimes it's simply around the ordinary of every day. Other times he introduces a big topic.

Sometimes the initiation for this is God. Sometimes it comes about through our situations. Frequently it's a combination of the two.

This year we face big challenges, not least the Transforming Trinity project. We shall have to take big decisions and work out together what we feel God is saying to us and what it is we should do.

We can approach this with fear and uncertainty, or we can look at the evidence of Jesus Christ and realise that his promises to us are secure – he is with us and will guide us.

Whatever challenges you face this year and whatever questions you have for God – and whatever we face as a church, what has been made clear to us was in our second reading.

What are we commanded to do?

1. Believe in Jesus
2. Love one another.

Everything else pretty much is subordinate to those two things.

If we focus on believing in Jesus and obeying his command to love each other, then other decisions will flow and be in accord with that.

On this our first Sunday of the year we leave with a clear message.

To make Jesus central and believe in him and to love one another.