

## Sermon for the Second Sunday before Lent Year B 2012

In the name...

In recent weeks we have been through the season of the Epiphany – the celebration of the great revealing of God that is encapsulated for us as Christians in the stories of the birth and early moments of Jesus' life.

The birth narratives present us with a story of revelation – in the double sense of that word – the story of God's ultimate intervention into the human world and the moment of understanding and clarity that came to some of those who witnessed those astonishing events.

So we have had the Shepherds kneeling at the stable – outcast and slightly despised members of the Jewish community – as the very first worshippers and believers in the action of God that is Jesus. It's fascinating that right at the start of the Gospel life the whole thrust of Jesus ministry is caught in these men. Their poverty and their alienation from the society in which they lived foreshadowing the work that the man Jesus took on in bringing the message of the love of God not to the rich and the righteous but to those who know their need of love and forgiveness.

And we have the Gentile Kings bowing their knees before the King of the Jews, and acknowledging him as their Messiah and Lord too. In the Gospel story itself Jesus is not always quick to realise that His message was for all of God's humanity – and yet here at the start the Church, reflecting back on the importance of Jesus for the world places this missionary imperative at the very start of the redemptive life of Christ.

And all this is summed up in the Festival we kept last week – the feast of the Epiphany – where Simeon proclaims Jesus as the 'Light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of the people Israel'.

A tiny child in his parents arms who ends the great division between the Chosen People and the rest of humanity. Christ becomes the new life of humanity – making one people of the divided and broken world into which He born and sent.

Today's readings take up that magnificent theme and place it firmly in the context of creation and the redemption not just of humanity but of all that God has made. Christ's salvation isn't a narrow salvation for one species but it is the redemption of all that is, and has been and will be, it is the recreation of creation itself as God reconciles the world to Himself and to itself.

The first passage we heard this morning is from Proverbs and it is a beautiful poem of creative love - and it lays out what for us as Christians is clearly a foretaste of the way we understand Jesus as the Word of God - though in this ancient Biblical tradition Proverbs calls this companion with God in the creative exercise 'Wisdom'.

When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
<sup>28</sup>when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
<sup>29</sup>when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,<sup>30</sup> then I was beside him,

The Wisdom of God stands alongside Him as the Universe is made and time, and space and life come into being. Poetry and myth as these words are they express a profound truth that clearly underlies the words of that great theologian who wrote the Gospel of John. John wrote after the first age of Christian thought and reflected the growing understanding of Jesus not simply as Messiah but as Lord and God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being<sup>4</sup> in him was life,<sup>\*</sup> and the life was the light of all people.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Both traditions see God at work in His creation - choosing to make this world and fill it with life and promise. The Creative narratives of our faith our positive and joyful - when God rests from His labours in Genesis He sits back, so to speak, to survey His handiwork and 'behold, it was very good.'

The prologue of John speaks of the creative power of God as His Word - and in this he seems to understand that from the moment of creation there is a desire in God to communicate with His creation - and yet the writer goes on to say 'He came to His own and His own received Him not'. We could see this not simply as a reflection on the failure of the Jewish community to accept Jesus as its Messiah but also as a profound statement of the necessity of the redemption of Christ in the first place. All of creation fails to hear the voice of its creator and this lays the ground for the necessity of Christ - the Word who enables us to hear again the wonder of God's love for us and for all that He has made.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The Christian message is not simply good news for us – it is a confident assertion of the love of God for all that He has made – and that this world, in all its awesome and sometimes terrible beauty and wonder is loved and precious and above all redeemed in Christ.

That breadth of vision for the world – that understanding of the all embracing love of God is a powerful message and it opens us up to the world around us to see in everything around us the glory of God communicating with us through His redemptive Word. It makes every step, every sight, every breath a sharing in that new and renewed communication with God that Jesus came to proclaim and live. It sets the space in which we live as holy and as a blessing to be enjoyed, and respected and cherished. We live in a redeemed and beautiful world – and as Christians we can see in it the glory of God – full of grace and truth.

Amen