

We're called to enable people to believe in Jesus

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Epiphany 2022 – Isa 60 1-6, Ps 72 1-7, 10-14, Eph 3 1-12, Matt 2 1-12

We've just heard the story of that light-bulb moment in scripture when representatives of the whole known world come to see Jesus, the infant king. In this moment, which we call the Epiphany (*manifestation*), the nations meet the God of Israel; the God of the universe, revealed to them in the person of the infant Jesus. Long before, God had promised this to Abraham; that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed. ^(Gen 12.3) So at this moment when the nations come to Jesus, we Christians see the destiny of the chosen people affirmed. The promised blessing of the nations is being fulfilled.

So what does that mean for us? Christian history is filled with this Epiphany mission – both us taking the Gospel out to the world, and people coming to us. Taking the Gospel out has had its unfortunate side. Mission and foreign policy in the form of colonisation have been mixed together in ways that have had good and bad outcomes. And the other process – people coming to us – church signs all saying '*everyone welcome*' – has seen a steady decline over the past half century. And even within and between churches, there is disagreement about how the gospel might be shared – how people might be blessed by an encounter with Jesus.

Some of my ancestors were missionaries. They went out to far-flung places intending to carry Jesus out to the heathen. But like so many other missionaries, they were surprised to discover that Jesus had got there before them. As missionaries

learnt more of the language, the customs and the traditions of their intended converts, they discovered local stories and teachings that bore remarkable resemblances to the gospel of Jesus. Adnyamathanha elder Rev Dr Auntie Denise Champion has written books which give beautiful examples of this happening.

So where does that leave us? I believe we're called to enable people to believe in Jesus. But it may be that they've met him already. They may have been introduced to him in unfortunate ways which have confused Jesus' message with particular politics, values or behaviours, and discouraged them from pursuing the relationship any further.

I believe that we can be part of a healing, Epiphany process. If we each pray and read scripture daily, we open ourselves to the Spirit to transform and renew us. And if we know that Jesus is already reaching out to people we meet, then we can be part of his outreach –both to us and through us. I like to think that we participate in this Epiphany process every day; through respectful, open and life-giving interactions with others and through actions that reflect Jesus' passion for justice, mercy and faith. Through our lives, Christ will continue to be manifested in the world. May God grant us grace to be people of an on-going Epiphany. Amen