

Don't we use some strange terms in Church? Some of those old names for the Sundays before Lent – Septuagesima, Sexagesima, Quinquagesima – they roll off the tongue; there was a history to their usage. The season of the Church's year that we have just entered – Epiphany. Starting on the 6<sup>th</sup> January it marks the end of Christmas, associated with the arrival of the Magi at the stable.

Epiphany – again it rolls off the tongue; but what does it mean? So I looked it up in my dictionary – “a moment of manifestation of divine reality” Maybe a simpler way of putting it would be “moments when God breaks through”, those moments of revelation, realisation, when God seems very real.

You see it in the psalms. Psalm 8 for example: “When I see the heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have put in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”

These moments when heaven and earth seem to meet. Our Gospel passage, which tells of the Baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan; We read from Matthew. Mark puts it a bit differently, “as Jesus was coming out of the water he saw ‘the heavens torn apart’ and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.” A moment of clarity, of realisation.

This morning I just want to think a bit around this whole topic of epiphany, of God making himself known. There is that little verse you often see in gardens, ‘you are nearer to God in the garden than anywhere else on earth.’ Not being a great gardener, I have never fully identified with that one. But there is that sense that God is revealed, that we encounter God in his creation – whether it

be the enormity of the heavens as we see them in the night sky – the stars we see millions and millions of miles away – the beauty of the rainbow, the changing colours of an evening sky as the sun dips below the horizon – or the amazing order of the atomic and subatomic world. The sheer order of creation, from the expanses of the galaxies to the interaction of the smallest subatomic particles, all expressed in mathematical models has never ceased to inspire me, to move me to wonder, to worship. Well may we say with the psalmist, when I consider the work of your fingers – what is man that you are mindful of him?

The Bible not only talks of God as creator; in the first of the Creation narratives in Genesis we read of God creating man in his own image, male and female he created them. What does it mean to say that you and I are created in the image of God? To be an image of something always means letting that something appear, involves revealing it.

You and I, in all our brokenness and frailty, bearers of God's image, called in our own daily life not just to bear an external witness to God, but to reveal God, to bring something of the divine to bear upon the world in which we find ourselves. To treat every other human being with a respect and a reverence; to recognise in every other human being, however different, however awkward or abrasive or difficult, something of the divine.

Then of course, as we are reminded in the Christmas Gospel, there is the mystery of the incarnation. “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

In the Incarnation, in his divinity and his humanity Jesus reveals God, reveals what we are called to be in our humanity. And so St Paul tells the Christians in Philippi, ‘Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.’ As ones made in the image of God, we are called to reflect in our own lives, as individuals and as a community, something of the self giving, self emptying love of Christ.

In our Family Service, as we think of the Baptism of Jesus by John, I am going to be thinking a bit about our own Baptism and the vocation that flows from our baptism. As we are reminded in the service itself, it is nothing less that to ‘live as disciples of Christ’, in our work and in our family life, in our relaxation. Called in fact, as ones made in the image of God, to be instruments of epiphany, that through us God’s presence may be felt.