

One night before Christmas, Rachel and I were over in our son's house in Donnybrook putting the children to bed. As we turned out the lights, Ryan pointed to the ceiling and said, 'Look, Grandpa. Look!' On the ceiling there were fluorescent stars. We hadn't noticed them when the lights were on but as the lights went out they glowed in the dark. They reminded me of those toys you used to get in your Cornflakes when I was growing up. The principle behind these things is quite simple – when light shines on these things, the energy is absorbed and then released as that greenish fluorescent light – a phenomenon that has delighted youngsters down through the years.

This image of the stars on that bedroom ceiling fluorescing in the darkness came to me as I reflected on our Lesson from Isaiah and the whole theme of light that runs through from those words we read on Christmas Eve from John's Gospel:

⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. *Jn 1:4*

to the image from the Gospel reading we have read today, the Gospel appointed for the Feast of the Epiphany, of the star that lead the wise men from the East to worship the Christ child.

As I sit down to reflect on a theme, I often find it instructive to follow how a particular word or theme is used in Scripture. So earlier this week I followed the word 'light' through the Old Testament, its poetry and prophetic books and on into the New Testament.

Light is one of the great themes of the Creation story as we are presented with that wonderful image of God declaring over the swirling darkness of nothingness, 'Let there be light' – and there was light. There is the pillar of fire that illuminates the way as Moses leads the people out of the darkness of slavery in Egypt. Running through the Old Testament is this sense of an

illuminating, empowering presence of God with his people; in the still small voice experienced by Elijah in the wilderness, the shaking of the pillars of the Temple in Isaiah. In the Psalms this is often expressed in terms of light:

Ps 18:28 It is you who light my lamp;
the LORD, my God, lights up my darkness.

Ps 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

It is a presence in and through which we begin to make sense of the world around us

Ps 36:9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

But there is another strand running through in which we are to be not just recipients of light but channels of light. So we read in our Old Testament Lesson this morning:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
.....
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Receivers of light must be ones who shed light on others – this is where the thought of those fluorescent stars on the ceiling of our grandsons’ bedroom came to my mind. From the very outset of Israel’s pilgrimage before God, there was the realisation that God’s blessing was given so that they might be a blessing to the wider world. As Abram is called to leave his homeland and journey to the land that God will show him, as he hears the promise of descendants, he and his descendants are given their vocation before God:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. *Gen 12:1,2*

I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. The blessing is given so that it might be shared – but we can only be a blessing to the extent that we are prepared to appropriate that blessing. It is here that my thoughts turn once more to those fluorescent stars on our grandsons' bedroom ceiling. As the night goes by, the stars on the ceiling fade as the energy absorbed when the bedroom light was on is exhausted. They will not shine again until they are exposed to the light.

In the Gospels we read of Jesus speaking of himself, 'I am the light of the world.' and of his disciples in terms of light;

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. *Matt 5:14ff*

Our ability to shed God's light in the world, depends on our willingness to receive that light in our own lives, the time we are prepared to give to reflection, to prayer, to meeting together for worship.

As we move from Christmas into the new Year, on into Epiphany and on into the future, we will be thinking more and more about how we see ourselves as a Parish, as a community, how we relate to those on the edges, those, who whatever reason, are not here in our midst. At the heart of it all must be an understanding of who we are – not an organisation seeking our own preservation but an integral part of the Body of Christ called to shed something of the light of the Christ we encounter and worship in this place.