



Third Sunday after Epiphany

23rd January 2011

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9 ; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 ; Matthew 4:12-25

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

The first reading from Isaiah brings back into focus the readings of Christmas, and if we continued for a further two verses we would hear:

'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Isaiah employs the symbolism of Light and the coming of light to those who have walked in darkness; at Midnight mass as we also celebrated the coming of light, we had a similar reading from Isaiah 9:2

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.'

So today we have an echo of the meaning of Christmas, which is a festival and celebration of the coming of light, and like Isaiah's text, the festival pre-dates our later Christian interpretations. Around Christmas we acknowledge the turning of the year, we acknowledge the movement of the sun, the changing of the seasons; all are somehow rolled into the 'birth of Christ' celebration we know as Christmas.

Isaiah gives us another contrast to go with his illustration of light and darkness; he speaks of "*in the former time*" and "*in the latter time*", thereby locating himself in 'the now', in the present moment (and perhaps in the ever-present moment). For us to receive light and life from these texts, we too must bring them into our 'now', into our present and into our presence. Are we able to stand with Isaiah and see, are we able to stand with Isaiah and perceive, that now is the time of movement from 'former' to 'latter'; are we able to appreciate the illumination of light in the darkness of our world, and are we able to comprehend that *a child has been born for us*.

It is important to appreciate again where Isaiah stands, for his writing, his vision and his experience pre-date Christmas, and yet he knew that *a child has been born for us*. So maybe we too should look before Christmas, and as we do that we come to the mystery of Easter and to the movement of dying and rising. In the 'now' of the cross the former is brought to an end; and in the 'now' of the tomb the latter is brought to birth.

Matthew brings Isaiah into his 'now' by quoting Isaiah as a prophesy fulfilled in Christ. If we accept this as the only reading then we leave the movement, the knowing of Isaiah and of Matthew located some 2000 years in the former times. We lose the realisation of the text in the present. Matthew brings Isaiah into his time and place, for he is seeking to share an awareness with a Jewish community who seek the coming of

light in a Messiah. We too must bring Isaiah and Matthew into our time and place if we are to appreciate what the coming of light means and reveals for us.

Let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves if all this talk of movement is necessary. Do we need to bother about the coming of light when we're all relatively happy in a sunburnt country? On Wednesday we'll celebrate Australia Day, and much, most, of the nation will turn on the light of fireworks to illuminate the story that we are already in the Promised Land. Paul encounters a similar display of delusional enlightenment in Corinth: I belong to Paul – so I'm OK; I belong to Apollos – so I'm OK; I belong to Cephas – so I'm OK; and I'm Australian – and apart from the cricket, I'm OK!

As Paul says: "*the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing*" but to those who know themselves as part of One body, one divine birth – "*it is the power of God.*" Paul seeks to illuminate the foolishness of those who see, and experience, themselves as apart from others. He does not advocate sameness; he does not advocate uniformity and he does not ask for behavioural compliance. Rather, he asks that we seek 'agreement' and so appreciate ourselves and each and every other without division and with a unity of mind and purpose. It is obvious that this requires a shift, a movement from the former times into a new paradigm of the latter.

Isaiah's movement points to a world, to our world, in which the yoke of burden and the rod of the oppressor are no more. A world where we and all are free to know the fullness of life that is "*a child... born for us.*" Those of you who have ever contemplated writing your biography, picture it with the title '*A Child Born for Us*', for that is each and every biography.

In the narrative of the temptations in the wilderness, which is just before today's portion of the gospel, we are shown that our divine giftedness (the child revealed) is not for our own selfish ends; rather, for a higher purpose, for the realisation of a 'latter time' in which all are one.

We hear in today's gospel that Jesus *withdrew to Galilee* – another movement. He moves away from the authorities that imprisoned John the Baptist, away from the powers of this world that confine, contain and control any movement into a new tomorrow. And following that movement, v17 begins "*from that time....*" Those three words identify a new beginning. Here we might find the divine possibility awakened in each of us; we might begin to grasp the call to 'repent' – 'repent', which in its original Greek combines both time and change, a verb that speaks of a change in direction and a movement from former to latter times. In its context today, we read of the movement that Jesus himself makes, and as he makes that movement himself, we have his call, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" It is a call, an invitation into the same movement. And as he walked, so others followed, leaving behind the 'latter' and stepping into a newness of life, a life that walked in the same movement that Christ reveals, and so stepping into a knowing of themselves *as a child born for all.*

This movement of repentance speaks of a wonderful truth; it is a truth that is yet to be realised: we are the body of Christ.

The Lord be with you.

Peter Humphris

Isaiah.....

6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

divisions

1 in the church of Corinth

and then wider sense of theology

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Matthew 4:12-23

Jesus has been tempted by the devil in the wilderness. His responses show his complete dedication to the will and purpose of God. He has refused to use his divine power to his own human ends. Now he *withdraws* from “Nazareth” (v. [13](#)) to “Capernaum”, so he can begin his mission safe from government interference. (John the Baptist has been arrested. Sepphoris, near Nazareth, was a Roman administrative centre. If the authorities seek to arrest him, he can escape more easily from Capernaum – by boat – than from Nazareth.) Matthew is keen to show Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies: he quotes Isaiah in condensed form (vv. [15-16](#)) to show that Jesus is the future ideal king, the Messiah. (In Isaiah, the “sea” is the Mediterranean; here it is the Sea of Galilee.)

“From that time” (v. [17](#)) marks a milestone: the launch of Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus proclaims: turn back to godly ways, to making God part of your way of thinking, for the completion of God’s plan for all created beings is close! Vv. [18-22](#) tell of the calling of the first four disciples. (We know “Simon” as “Peter”.) Jesus the teacher invites them to follow him, speaking in their terms (“fish for people”, v. [19](#)) and fulfils Jeremiah [16:16](#); there the LORD is “sending for many fishermen” to Israel. They give up their trade and “immediately” (v. [20](#)) begin a radically different way of life. Jesus expects, and receives, prompt obedience. He proclaims the “good news” (v. [23](#)) in both word and deed (healing). His ministry is to Jews, but people from “Syria” (v. [24](#)), “the Decapolis” (v. [25](#), Hellenistic towns) and “beyond the Jordan” also come to him to hear his message.