

Sibyls

Zoom meeting for worship on 7 January 2021

And I said to the one who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown”

And they replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God,
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone East.

So heart be still:

What need our little life, Our human life to know, If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife Of things both high and low, God hideth His intention.

God knows. His will is best.

The stretch of years Which wind ahead, so dim To our imperfect vision,
Are clear to God. Our fears Are premature; In Him, All time hath full provision.

Extract from ‘God Knows’ by Minnie Louise Haskins, 1908

Welcome everyone to this period of worship at the beginning of the year, at a time of concern and uncertainty.

For many of us Christmas was spent alone. Some of us changed our plans to follow Covid restrictions. Some of us shared with family and church friends on screen and phone. Some may have been able to join worship on Zoom. After these days of ease and respite, we now are returning to day-to-day life. But in a new lockdown, amid international shifts, we start the year with anxiety, with varying hopes and fears. We are all mindful of our well-being, and that of our families and friends, children and elderly people, teachers, health workers, shop staff, politicians.

How does faith strengthen us in this time of disruption, disease, unease?

Where do we find and feel hope?

What does love require of me?

Today we will reflect on what epiphany might mean for us now. Epiphany is new light, realisation, humility and wonder.

In the church calendar, Epiphany celebrates the first revelation of Jesus Christ to those outside the Jewish community, specifically the gentile explorers who travelled a great distance from another country, full of astrological curiosity. Finally arriving in a mundane place, they encountered the baby Jesus. They recognised him as both human and divine. A realisation that God was here. An epiphany is a dawning – it dawned on these travellers that Jesus was divine, and they worshipped him with gifts.

..... After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.... Matthew 2: 9-11 (NIV)

...The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.... John 1: 9-13 (NIV)

The Lord is my Light

How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus's example of love in action? Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his relationship with God challenge and inspire you?

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Three reflections on epiphany.....

Open to new light

Jesus grew through childhood revealing his divinity to his mother, who treasured these things in her heart. Growing into adulthood, he is the person who taught his followers, then us, things that were so enlightening – but only after he had built a story around them or revealed the truth in another person. He put up with doubters, scepticism and prejudice; he used gentleness and passion to shake us into realisation that Jesus is God. Realising this is our way of putting our hand into the hand of God.

Jesus is the light of the world. We encounter this light in different and surprising ways. It does not just happen once, epiphany can happen many times, a realisation at particular times of need and with people we encounter.

Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life, and often in unexpected ways in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys. Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come?

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Personal revelation and transformation

Many of us know epiphany in a personal way – a revealing clarity about our essential nature, a grasp of gender and who we really are, that helps us live more fully and more truthfully.

But what a problem being transgender is – what a burden on relationships, safety, respect. Yet as well as the challenges, what a wonder our gender can be. Rightness that frees the spirit and finds truth, which we can treasure in our heart, whatever practical steps we can or cannot take. We take comfort in our self-knowledge that brings us closer to God.

Take heed dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

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Realising the pain and truth of others

Epiphany might also mean a clearer revelation of a social truth. In our sleep-walking view of the world, shaped by the assumptions of our own cultures, we are frequently shaken to fully realize the experience of other people. The huge numbers of displaced refugees, the suffering of women through sexual and coercive abuse; child poverty that prevails in our housing estates, what we have all gained from black lives and prevailing discrimination. God is revealed in Jesus and all these lives.

Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others.

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Light of the World

Prayer

In the silence

Let us all hold in the Light those we know who are going through difficult times.

If you would like to pray for someone, offer a prayer, a blessing or the peace, please unmute yourself and speak.

The Lords prayer

All on mute, we all say the Lords prayer in our chosen way, knowing we are speaking it together.

In this renewed lockdown, we may feel unable to do anything that really helps. But over the past year we have encountered new ways to connect and to make a difference. So we pray we can make our lives speak this year, when so much of normal life is limited and so many people will need support.

Dear God, the star that led the Magi to the stable announced to the world that the Saviour was born. Today we live in a world that is still covered by darkness, and still needing to make that journey to the stable door. May our lives reflect your light day by day, as we seek to serve where you have placed us. That we might be the means through which others can encounter Jesus Christ. Amen

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you.

Martha Graham, dancer and choreographer

‘And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one’

Quaker Faith and Practice 19.32

Gloria - Vivaldi

