Sermon

Epiphany

31/12/17

Eltham

**Readings**

Isaiah 60:1-6 (OT p 535)

Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3: 1-12 (NT p149)

Matthew 2:1-12 (NT p 1)

+FSHS

*A star burned in the sky more brightly than all the others; its light was indescribable, its newness marvellous, and all the other stars, along with the sun and moon, formed a chorus around this star, the light of which reached farther than that of any other ...* For its power grew and it was beautiful beyond all that is beautiful, dancing, silent music embellishing angel-song. The song! oh, the song! Arise and shine! the star called to the earth beneath; for the glory of God shines upon you, the light of salvation rests on you. Like a garment God's glory is spread on you for a covering! Rejoice, be glad. For God has touched creation, and in touching has become one with it. The world, the stars themselves, the cosmos - cradled in God's arms, held tenderly to God's breast - just as this infant is cradled in the arms of a young woman, and held tenderly at her breast. So the star-song grew, and its wild refrain echoed through the universe, shaking the pillars of all that is with a terrible joy.

For this star and its corona bore the message, it was the sacrament enacting what was signed - the king is born, and unbelievable, far beyond the grasp of sense or understanding, the mystery of God is revealed: God the Maker becomes the made, the eternal circumscribed in a child, immortal taking on mortality... The saving bond is formed: God's future tied to the future of God's creation. God, the companion and friend, brother and lover to all that is, drawing near, and drawing breath in and with the creation, as part of it. No more separation, no more aloneness, no more fear. The stars sang. The realm of God is finally announced in the birth of its king, the one whose righteousness means peace for all people, justice for the poor, rescue for the needy, and deliverance from oppression. The stars sang of the love of God, falling like rain to water the fields. The love of this king, the Human One, in whom the bond is formed, its representative and herald, the first fruits; the love of this king treasures the blood of his people - he will protect and deliver them, not just from their enemies, but from poverty, helplessness, and need. And the reign of this king, the stars sang, will be as long as light endures, as long as there is day and night, as long as the stars, the sun and moon together are able to continue the song. Sing! sang the stars, and the song was of God's embrace in this tiny child, in his light.

And somewhere there were people watching the skies. Priests in their own rites, priests in a foreign cult, kings of a distant people who had once enslaved God's chosen ones. These outsiders were watching the skies, and they heard the star-song strange singing in their ears. For clear to them the promise of God-with-us: the star's message that God's embrace is for all. Never and always touching and touched, the fire and the light of the star-song declared the bond of God with creation all-inclusive. So captivating the star-song, these wise priests were compelled to follow its lead, and join in the song and the intricate dance of the light through the eastern skies. The song! oh, the song! Arise and shine! for the glory of God awaits you, cradled, waiting for your embrace. Knowing this touching of the Maker of all, what could they offer him? They would take what they had: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Fragile gifts for the all-powerful one who gave himself to them in great fragile vulnerability: God in the fullness of humanity, one of them, one of us. The stars sang.

They travelled the long miles, and finally, dusty came to the place where the star-song led. The song intensified as they stepped into the house. They offered their gifts, and knew them inadequate. For they held the child in their arms, and felt his embrace, felt the bond, felt the touch of God on their faces and in their hearts. And they knew that from then onwards, they would know the star-song in their hearts, and see it reflected in the faces of friend and foe alike. This embrace, this touch, was for all without exclusion. And whenever they breathed deeply, or experienced sunrise, sunset, moon rise, the candle shining in the darkness after all hope was lost, they would know again the touch of this God-child in their hearts and minds, and never lose hope again. Their hearts sang, full of star-song light. For the mystery of the Christ-light was revealed to them, and shone upon them, and within them.

The stars are still singing. Their song is for and about us, as much as it was about and for those who lived 2000 years ago. The epiphany the wise folk received, the revelation of God's light, love, embrace, forgiveness - this is also for us, if we notice it, and for us, if we embrace it. Think about epiphanies you may have had, times when you may have been aware of God's touch in your heart and mind, of the light breaking into your darkness with blinding intensity and cosmic star-song. Easter at CCSL, Easter at College. The new light, the new fire in the darkness and the dawning. Sunset, the quality of the sun in the late afternoon... These are touches, reminding me that God is companion and friend, closer to me than my own breath. The star-song, the light-song which echoes through the years, invites us to look for fresh epiphanies of God's light and God's touch in our day to day experience, experiences which deepen and serve to reconnect us again to the bond God has made with us in becoming one with us in Christ. If we listen to the star-song, like the wise folk we too will be drawn again into God's embrace. Once drawn into that embrace we will know that our own hearts sing the star-song of salvation, and we too will become light bearers, stars by whom all people might be drawn into God's embrace.

*Then all magic was destroyed, and every bond wrought by wickedness was broken, and the ancient kingdom was razed. When God appeared in human form to bring the newness of eternal life, his counsel began to be fulfilled. (Ignatius of Antioch, Second Century)*

And the stars sang together, and they still are singing: Arise and shine! for the glory of God shines upon you, the light of salvation rests on you. Rejoice and be glad.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**