

201 CV Thought for the Epiphany (Jan 6th)

by Didymus

Sunday Evensong.

Isaiah ch.42, vv1-9

Eph ch.2, vv1-10

Matt ch.3, vv13-end

The Epiphany. It is many things, but the central event was the encounter between the infant Jesus and Gentiles, or in other words, non-Jews.



The occasion was the first direct encounter with God. An epiphany is an experience, a vision, a dream, or a presentiment of God's presence in some way, even just a feeling. It is not something which one might be dreaming about, conjecturing about an event or a person, and it has not been summoned up through our own thought processes. It comes from without, unbidden. This of course is my own view, for the ways in which God prods, reminds and indeed laughs at us are many and various, and we learn as we grow. It's not written down.

On the day before Epiphany we have Twelfth Night, which is not a religious event. It is far more important than that. It is when the house goes berserk, with reluctant husbands chased out of their armchairs in order to retrieve ladders so as to remove holly, mistletoe, Christmas trees, cards (especially that rude one from the office), empty boxes and all the impedimenta so recently put in place. All this commotion is to prevent being struck down with a year's bad luck. (*So what's new? - Ed*)

This is a difficult time for chronology enthusiasts, as we trace our Lord briefly as a child, as a teenager and as a grown man, all at the same time. We read of him at circumcision, presented in the Temple, and today, baptised. Jesus must have been 22-23 at his baptism. His baptismal date is generally assumed to be the start of his, sadly, short career as a teacher and leader. The miracles that he performed would have been beyond anyone without the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the past I had wondered why the amazing events in scripture had never been used in opera, one of my passions, which I put it down to respect for faith and the power of the church. There are musicals such as "Joseph and the Technicolour Dreamcoat" and "Jesus Christ Superstar" which are fine but not quite opera. A few have tried: opera - Belshazzar's Feast by William Walton, and Verdi wrote "Stiffelio" based on John's ch.8 - the woman taken in adultery.



In 1951, Gian Carlo Menotti, was commissioned by the NBC to write a one act opera, which he did - "Amahl and the Night Visitors". It is a very charming fictitious, story, but which leans heavily on the visit of the Magi. Like most modern operatic attempts, it falls well short on melody. Amahl lived with his mother at the time of the Epiphany. He had been born, as I recall, with a deformity of one leg, but worked hard about the home to support his

mother.

One night there was a call at the door, and three strangers asked for shelter. The Hebrews and the Jews both respected desert hospitality, and so they were welcomed in, were fed and stayed the night in the house. Much of the dialogue has been forgotten, but I remember the climax. When the strangers departed, they left gifts, and as Amahl watched them go, he realised that his leg deformity had gone.

The reading in Isaiah speak of the coming of God's presence, while Paul is rousing the Ephesians to cleanse their lives from sin. Matthew concentrates on the baptism. The latter is interesting. Faced with Jesus and knowing who he was, John's reaction was understandable.

The important point is that Jesus was fully human, born of a human mother. Human beings are not perfect. They have the susceptibility, or weakness or tendency - call it what you will - to sin. To sin is to ignore or disobey God's will. Although divinely conceived, Jesus was human, and needed baptism as all humans do. He received the power of the Holy Spirit to enable his ministry and to perform miracles, principally of healing.



PRAYERS

Let us pray that we too, might feel God's presence in our lives
and the lives of others. AMEN