

Epiphany Sunday (Jan 2) 2011
Twente/Nijmegen

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

The Foolishness of God is Wiser...

There is a wonderful verse in one of St Paul's greatest, and perhaps most enduringly relevant letters. And it goes like this:

²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. (1 Cor 1:25)

As we recall the visit of those Eastern sages to the tiny baby Jesus on this day, it becomes even more apparent:

²⁵God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Why the Creator of all things and people should decide to save the world by becoming a part of it baffles us.

Moreover, why he should come to be born among us, not in the lap of luxury or in a royal palace, but in a lowly manger because there was no proper accommodation in an overcrowded provincial town is also a bit of a mystery. Even if one had managed to interpret all the ancient prophecies in the right way.

But God comes to us in relative obscurity, in relative poverty, humbly, gently. Are these not signs of the nature of His Kingdom: a kingdom of peace and holiness, where the poor are lifted up and those who thirst and hunger for true righteousness are filled?

²⁵God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Gathered round the newborn King of all things are his adoring mother, and the beasts of the farm and the field – kind of reminiscent of that strange prophecy of Isaiah 11: ¹A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ²The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of

counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; ... ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

As we reflect on the nativity scene, we begin to see how ²⁵'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.'

The shepherds, rough and poor, are the first, besides Mary and Joseph, to hear the Good News. The King will be a Shepherd for his people, not a showman or a charlatan. The prophecy of Jeremiah 23 begins to make sense as a sign to those who rule and those who suffer:

23:¹Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. ²Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. ³Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

And finally, we have the wise men. Again, apparently a bizarre thing. Where did they really come from? What were they looking for? Why did they bring offerings?

Again, we can look back to the mysterious yet hopeful ancient prophecies of Isaiah (60):

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³ Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

A light came to the minds of foreigners. Of a bright and hopeful future. Of a Messiah not just for one nation but for all nations.

In an era in our own history where we are being tempted to think that our societies have a monopoly on wisdom and culture, and should have a monopoly on power and wealth, at a time when we are being tempted to close our minds and borders to all outside influences, once again the Gospels of Christ speak out.

Epiphany: Behold, intelligent foreigners from some land east of the Mediterranean got it right. And the insiders and intelligentsia in the capital city got it wrong.

Let us meditate on that, and the fact that these strangers were openhearted and open minded and were welcomed to worship and order the Christ.

They complete the picture of the nativity: the poor, the marginalized, the foolish and downtrodden, the foreigners with their strange customs and curious gifts, all gathered around, welcomed around the precious crib.

We too are all welcome. There is more than enough room for us all, if we make room in our hearts. For God and all of God's children.

God's salvation is come among us in a surprising, astounding and humbly beautiful way:

²⁵ 'For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.' Thanks be to God. Amen.