



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Messiah Revealed

Isaiah 9:1-4 ; Matthew 4:12-23

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We are in the church season of Epiphany. Which probably doesn't mean much to most of us. Epiphany follows Christmas as we hear again how the Christ was revealed to the world. You see, "Epiphany" is the English form of a Greek word meaning reveal or show to.

Epiphany records the coming of the Wise Men to see the infant Jesus. They came to see the one born to be king of the Jews. So the Christ was shown to the Gentiles.

The season continues with Isaiah's prophecies of a suffering servant sent to God's people and the Baptism of Jesus and proclamation by John the Baptist that this is the Lamb of God. This week we hear again from Isaiah that the Messiah would minister in Galilee, and Matthew tells us of the start of Jesus' ministry as he moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.

The season concludes next week with "The Presentation of Christ in the Temple."

Manifestation

Last week we thought about the Spiritual Gifts and how they are manifestations or showings of the Holy Spirit. They show the Spirit at work in the Church.

This week we think about the Epiphany the showing or revealing of Christ to people. How is he shown in the Gospel passage?

Matthew starts by quoting the passage we read from Isaiah. Isaiah wrote of the tribal areas of Naphtali and Zebulun. These tribes were humbled in that they bore the brunt of the Assyrian invasion in times past. The Way of the Sea was the name of the trade route running north from Egypt through Israel up inland through Galilee and out to the north.

These descriptions define the locality where Jesus did much of his ministry. Naphtali and Zebulun's areas met at the northern end of Lake Galilee. Capernaum at the head of the lake was the main base of Jesus' operations. It is to these people that he is first revealed or as it is put in the prophecy: "those walking in darkness saw a great light."

How was it they saw this light or had this revelation?

What Matthew tells us is it was by Jesus teaching and preaching that God's rule is near, calling men to follow him and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

How do we show Jesus to those around us? [You might think about that.]

We heard the account of Jesus calling Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him. "Immediately, they left their nets and followed him." There was an authority when Jesus called which caused men to walk away from their livelihood in obedience. I often wonder how Zebedee felt!

Have you heard the call of Jesus in any way? The call to be a Christian? Hopefully so. The call to an particular place, job, marriage, activity, ministry. He is calling today and when you know you have heard him, it is very compelling.

Maybe he is calling you to something now – how will you respond?

The reading today finished with this significant verse:

²³ “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”

It would be good to hear the next two as well:

²⁴⁻²⁵ “News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.”

Why do I say significant?

1. It is significant because he didn't just speak he acted. He healed every disease and sickness among the people.

They brought to him all who were ill with various diseases. The Greek is actually all who were “having it badly with many kinds of diseases.” Are you ‘having it badly’ today? You need to come to Jesus for him to heal you.

Matthew gives examples of categories: tormented with pain, having demons, epileptics, the paralysed. And he healed them.

2. It is significant because in this he showed his character. He wants to heal. He isn't reluctant. If you doubt that, think about the cleansing of the temple. Matthew tells us in 21:12-14 that Jesus drove out the traders and turned over their tables and benches. Straight afterwards the blind and the lame come to him and he healed them. Then it continues with the outrage of the religious leaders before the end of that same day.

When he had just caused a furore and angered the leaders might not have been the most convenient time to stop and heal some people. The leaders are indignant and dangerous but he makes healing a priority just a couple days before the crucifixion. That says to me healing was and is close to the heart of Jesus.

3. It is significant because this verse is the start of an *inclusio*. It is the marker of the beginning of a section of writing. It acts as the heading saying what Matthew is about to tell us. In Matthew 9:35, it repeated virtually word for word:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.”

These two verses act as the header and footer and in between Matthew gives us evidence to support his statement. So we find the account of Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7); we are given evidence of his healing authority in the cases of the leper, the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law and many others delivered and healed in chapter 8. Chapter 9 offers evidence of his authority over nature as he calms the storm, over the demonic as he delivers the Gadarene man, authority to forgive sins and heal with the paralysed man lowered on mat. He raises Jairus' daughter, heals the woman with the flow of blood and heals the blind and delivers the mute man.

At the end of this catalogue, Matthew restates the idea of the *inclusio*, which brings it to an end and tells us, “I have shown that you now.” In case you miss the point, Matthew immediately tells of Jesus sending the disciples out to do the same. It is not just Jesus but his followers who do these things.

New Wine

Twenty of our parish attended the New Wine conference: eleven right through and nine for a portion. One of the speakers was Robby Dawkins who prophesied over two people in the large congregation. One of them was our Michael Watson. It was an encouraging word for him. What was even better was that the message echoed a dream Michael had had the previous night. I know Michael has been encouraged and emboldened by this prophecy.

Robby also did a demonstration healing where he asked people with back pain to come on stage. There were four. He prayed for the first woman – no change. And again, and again. At that point he said an interesting thing: Healing is warfare. So he is not surprised if he has to keep trying. Then he got the woman to pray for a young man. He was not healed either. Then he got them both to pray for the third person. She had an immediate significant improvement and over two more repetitions moved to no pain and able to bend over freely. Each time, he asked the pray-ers to check their own backs. At this point, the young man started to have some healing. Then the three prayed for the fourth, our own Ralph Jones. Ralph had significant improvement of his back pain and immobility of his neck. He told us last week that they were both healed now.

I spoke to that young man afterwards and he was able to touch his toes which amazed him as he had damaged his back in triathlon training and had been under therapy for months. This was a big release accompanied by a big reduction in pain.

I prayed for a woman with long-term neuropathy which caused her legs to be without feeling and her leg muscles weak. She had been dependent on a walker for years. She walked without the walker up and down a corridor just holding my hands for security. She told me the next day that she could feel the tiredness in her leg muscles and that was wonderful because she had not been able to feel them before. Secondly, she walked around her bedroom without the walker that night. Now it was not running and dancing. But there was a real change.

I am not telling you these stories to elevate Robby Dawkins or me. I believe this is for us in general to do – not a specialised few. I want to raise your expectation that God will use us - you - in special ways.

Just before Christmas, I spoke about my being freed of the oppression of scepticism, doubt and unbelief. Then, I offered the opportunity for us all to join in a declaration rejecting those things in our lives. I was thinking of you as those who would pray for others. I was taking a step towards empowering you. Unfortunately, I cannot have expressed myself well, because apparently a few thought I was blaming people who are not healed for not having faith.

Please be assured: that was not in my mind. In my thinking, it is the responsibility of the person praying for healing to have the faith. And we must never blame the other person for any supposed lack. So if you thought that was what I was doing be assured it was not.

How was Jesus revealed to the people? How did they see the light come into their darkness? Through his teaching and preaching; through his authority in calling men to follow him; through healing every disease and sickness among the people.

He did miracles. He taught with authority. He displayed his character.

I believe he still wants to be revealed. He still wants to do those things through his body – the church – us!