

**EPIPHANY 05-01-20** *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Isaiah 60:1-6; Ps 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

I had a perfectly good sermon written for Epiphany; you can have a copy of it if you like. As this week's news about the bushfires in various parts of Australia has gone from bad to worse to horrific, my sermon felt irrelevant and inadequate. So I started again.

When the Wise Men, Magi, Astrologers or whoever they were identified a new star as the sign of a new king, they didn't just sit back and say to each other, "Oh, look at that! Isn't it bright and shiny? I suppose if it's important enough, someone will do something about it."

THEY did something about it. They got the camels detailed, went shopping for presents, checked their maps, and off they went- into the unknown, following a star. They took notice, and the star led them to the Saviour.

Afterwards they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod; and they took notice and went home another way.

In 2020 we may not be influenced by dreams or signs in the stars in the way of those ancient people. We like to think we are logical and sensible, guided by science and observation.

We don't put much faith in superstition or old wives' tales, preferring scientific research, evidence-based, peer-reviewed, good hard facts. Stories about angelic messengers and prophetic dreams sound strange to our ears.

And yet one look at social media demonstrates that there are many who are still not convinced by science: anti-vaxxers, flat-earthers, and all sorts of other strange and wonderful conspiracy-theorists.

We might wonder what it would take to convince those misguided folks to see sense and look at the evidence that has convinced most people with an IQ in at least double figures.

We might also wonder why so many of the people who actually MET Jesus, heard him speak and watched him heal, didn't respond to his invitation to follow him. Many people did, but an awful lot didn't; they either ignored him or actively opposed him and his followers.

I suppose it just goes to show that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. We can't force people to accept or believe or even understand those things that may be clear and obvious to us.

The world's media is reporting on Australia's bushfire crisis, using terms like 'unprecedented', 'devastation', 'apocalyptic' and 'terrifying'- it is all these and more. We watch in horror as thousands have lost their homes, towns and communities are flattened, and people lose their lives. Roads are closed, people are trapped- and summer has only just started.

Then we read of funding cuts that have affected fire services; and we wonder why an apparent 'budget surplus' seems more important than the adequate resourcing of emergency services.

People around the world are calling Australia's fires evidence that we are experiencing a climate emergency. Last year was the hottest in Australia since records began, and fire experts have joined climate scientists in attempting to warn government that urgent action is needed.

What are we to do? Pray, of course; give money to the Red Cross if we want to; but will we continue to feel helpless and despairing as more of our country's flora and fauna burns to ashes?

We, as individuals, as a church, as a society, must learn from those wise ones of old. We must watch and learn and take action. We may think we cannot make much of a difference but we can- if enough of us decide we can.

The Magi came to visit a king, and instead they met the Saviour of the World. They were the first non-Jews to meet him, and represented God's offer of salvation to the whole world.

Jesus' life and the manner of his death show us a radically different way to be human. His is the way of love, forgiveness, kindness, justice, and peace. If we are to follow him then our lives will change- must change- as we become more like the people God always intended us to be.

How that works out in our daily lives will depend on what needs to change. Maybe we can ask ourselves some hard questions, such as:

- How does the way I live affect others on the planet? Do I demand cheap clothing, which can only be produced by people on very low wages?
- How much waste does my lifestyle produce? Am I thoughtful about what I use, re-use, recycle, or throw away?
- How dependent am I on my car and the fuel it burns?
- How ready am I to make real, sacrificial changes? Am I prepared to give up the unsustainable luxuries I take for granted?

Our world, this amazing planet on which we depend for everything, is being damaged by what we humans are doing. Our repentance means nothing unless we change our ways.

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Mary said 'Yes' to God, and in consenting to mothering Jesus she gave up the life she had anticipated.

Joseph said 'Yes' to being a father to Mary's baby in spite of all that might mean to his reputation.

The shepherds said 'Yes' to the angels when they left their sheep and went to find the baby.

The Wise Ones said 'Yes' when they went home by another way, protecting the Holy Family from Herod's murderous jealousy.

God's dream is for this world to live in peace, for all people to care for one another and for creation. As we weep with those who grieve lost loved ones, homes, animals, habitat, we know that God also weeps.

Let us pray that 2020 will be the year the world takes notice of the signs. Let us pray that governments will work together to find ways to protect the world, its people and all that lives. And let us pray that we will play our part and make a difference.

The Lord be with you.