



## **Feast of the Epiphany**

### **Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 7 January, 2024  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

When I became the Archbishop of Perth in 2012, I asked that the hymn "*Christ be our Light*" should be included in the Mass for my installation. I did so because I wanted to share with people my belief that the only way we can move forward together and become more fully the Church God has created us to be is by allowing ourselves to be guided by the light of Christ. This is what the Church is really all about, at least in theory and in principle. Sadly, however, this is not the way so many people, both within the Catholic community and outside it, experience the Church. For many, the Church as it goes about its business seems to conceal or disfigure the face of Christ rather than being a place where he is encountered in all his goodness, compassion, and love.

Pope Francis once reflected on this – in fact he returns to this theme very often - and he suggested that one of the reasons for this is that so many Christians do not always know or understand Jesus as well as they might think they do. For the Pope the stories of Christmas, including today's story of the visit of the Magi to the newborn child in Bethlehem, can help us to understand a little better who Jesus really is and what it means to say that he reveals to us the face of his heavenly Father.

We know, through these beautiful stories, that God sent his Son to an insignificant young woman and her future husband rather than to a wealthy and influential family. We know that he was not born in comfort and security but in poverty and uncertainty. His birth was announced by angels, it is true, but those angels spoke only to the shepherds who were the least important and often most despised people in the local community. The wise men, whose coming to visit the newborn king we celebrate this morning, had to learn the hard way that this king would not be found in a palace or in the halls of power but rather in a humble stable. We are very familiar with all this, of course, but because we hear the stories year after year, we can lose our sense of the strangeness of it all. What is God trying to tell us in choosing to come among us, in Jesus, in such an unexpected way? Why would he choose poverty over wealth, weakness over strength, gentleness over force, and invitation over demands?

Pope Francis suggests that one reason might be God's desire not to force the gift of his love and his salvation on us by a show of overwhelming power, but to come to us in a simple, humble, non-threatening way which will leave us free to accept the gift with gratitude rather than through fear. This is the way of love, the way of profound respect for each person's dignity and freedom. If the



belief which is at heart of our faith – that God is love – is true, then how could it have been otherwise when God entered into our human story as one of us?

When Jesus, towards the end of his life, spoke of himself as the Way, and the Truth, and the Life he was inviting us to see in him the qualities and attitudes of mind and heart which manifested themselves in the way he loved – and to recognise in them the best way for us to live our own journeys of life and faith, if we really want our lives to be all that they can be: lives full of love and integrity, which enrich the lives of all those around us, especially those closest to us. It is really this which ties all the Christmas stories together: they are stories of the love of God coming to birth in Jesus and, through him, able to come to birth in each one of us.

I would also add that these same stories show us the link between love and courage. There is nothing weak about love: in fact, it is the very opposite. Mary's "yes" to God when she found out that God was asking her to be the mother of the messiah was an act of great courage: it turned her life upside down. The same was true of Joseph, who could easily have turned Mary aside when he found out that she was pregnant. Both Mary and Joseph had to show great courage as they fled to Egypt to escape the murderous intent of King Herod, and the wise men of today's gospel also had to show courage, first in setting out on their long journey and then in defying Herod by not returning to him with news about the new-born King, as he had instructed them to do.

If we are to be people who can love generously and faithfully, we will need to ask God for the gift of courage, for love will make demands on us and at times this will be hard. We will need the courage to say, "I'm sorry" and the courage to say "I forgive you". We will need the generous courage to say "yes" when our more selfish instincts will be pushing us to say "no". We will need the courage to ask for help and the courage to offer help to others. And we will need the courage to admit our weaknesses and turn in humble prayer to God.

All of this can be found through our life of faith, nurtured in our life in the Church, for it is the task of the Church to constantly invite us into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus who is, or wants to be, our light. What we cannot realistically hope to be through our own unaided efforts - people of courageous faith and love - we can hope to through our relationship with Christ. This is what Saint Paul once said and I would like to conclude these few thoughts this morning by leaving you with his simple words: I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.