

## TUESDAY COMMUNION 6<sup>th</sup> Jan 09

**Hymn:** 122 Bethlehem, of noblest cities

**Reading:** Matthew 2.1-12, 16-18

### Prayers:

My newspaper this morning shows three small children.  
They look as though they are asleep but they are all dead.  
Their father, totally unable to support himself,  
is held by two of his friends:  
    a voice was heard in Gaza,  
    wailing and loud lamentation,  
    a father weeping for his children;  
    refuses to be consoled, because they are no more.

Who is to blame?

Time and again I'm reminded of the years in which I listened as Protestants and Catholics blamed each other for the troubles.

Behind ever accusation there was a counter accusation.  
Indeed, the tragic story of Israel and Palestine  
in which Europe is an innocent party.

The anti-Semitism in Europe over hundreds of years culminating in the Holocaust was a major factor behind the desire of many Jews for a land of their own.

The problem: the land has been inhabited for hundred of years by Christians and Muslims, Palestinians and Bedouin.

Terrorism marked the foundation of the state of Israel and terror has been used by both sides ever since in their attempt to gain and to hold what they believe rightly belongs to them.....

And today, on the Feast of Epiphany, we read the story of gentiles who come from the East to pay homage to a boy born of Jewish parents in Bethlehem, the town where Ruth from Moab lived and where her grandson, the future King David, was born.....

An "Epiphany" means "to show" or "to reveal."

Today we remember what God reveals to those Wise men and to us.....

**First, he reveals himself to be the God  
of both Jews and Gentiles.**

There is something profoundly moving to watch men from a different religious tradition prostrating themselves before the child of Mary.  
They adore a child who they sense has come into the world

not only for the sake of his own people but for the sake of all.

The Holy God is not the property of Jew or Gentile, of Christian, Muslim or Jew. He is the God we encounter in many places and in many traditions, and wherever we meet with him we are invited to worship him.

**Secondly, he is the God who comes in Jesus as Messiah, the newborn king.**

Matthew in his Gospel will reveal to us what that means in practice. Jesus lives the life of a travelling teacher and healer.....

His teaching goes beyond what has been taught in his own tradition:

“You have heard that it was said,

“You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he sends his son to rise on the evil and the good.”

He puts his teaching into practice for he goes the way that leads to the cross without hatred and bitterness but with firmness of resolve.

He dies for the sake of the world that we may know a God who loves us but does not compel us, who forgives us and wants us to live as his friends and as friends with one another.

**Thirdly, he comes as Immanuel, God with us.**

As the fighting continues in Gaza, God is with all the people of Gaza and all the people of Israel.

He is with them in their fear and suffering,

- he is with them as they threaten and kill,
- he is with them as they make excuses and blame the other side,
- he is with them as they begin to ask whether this savagery is really the way to resolve their tensions and disputes.
- He is with those who dare to dream that a day is coming when Israel and Palestine will find a new way of living together in peace

and justice.

God with us, with Wise Men and Mary and Joseph and in 2009 with us, too, as we seek the ways that lead to peace and justice for all in the year ahead.

Amen.