

Epiphany Sermon  
Sunday, 4 January 2026  
John 1:1–18 | Wisdom for the New Year

*Light of the world,  
shine where we would rather not look,  
stay where we are tempted to rush past,  
And give us the grace to receive the light  
that is already given. Amen*

In the early hours of Thursday morning, I woke in the dark and realised it was already after midnight. A new year had begun. Lying there, I said a simple prayer. I thanked God for life itself, for those I love who had been granted the privilege of seeing another year, for health, and for my vocation. And then I paused and wondered what I might ask of God in this first prayer offered in and for 2026.

My instinctive answer was to ask for more kindness. More goodwill. More love, even. But then my mind drifted... as it so often does when one prays. I found myself looking back over the year just past. I realised how many remarkable people I had encountered who seemed already full of love. People who care deeply, who show generosity and compassion in quiet, often costly ways. Many of them are seated here this morning. If love were what we lacked, the world would surely look and sound very different. Perhaps what we need is not more love, but more wisdom.

We want to love, but we do not always know how to love rightly. How should we love so that life really comes from it? That question requires wisdom. The Church has often been very good at telling people what is right and what is wrong, what is permitted and what is forbidden. But it has sometimes struggled to help people inhabit the grey areas of life with grace and courage. Yet it is precisely there, in those untidy, unresolved spaces, that wisdom is formed and required, because that's where most of us, if not all of us live our everyday lives. Nothing is ever simply black and white.

It is no accident that on the feast of the Epiphany it is the *wise* who make their way to the manger. Not the powerful or the impressive, not the wealthy or the talented...*but the wise*.

We are told in the second chapter of Matthew's Gospel that they read the signs, they travelled by night, they risk being wrong. They do not arrive in Bethlehem with any certainty, but they come with gifts. *Wisdom, it seems, knows how to kneel.*

Our Gospel reading for today, however, begins before first century Bethlehem, or census or Herod or even time itself. Before history, before our anxieties about the year ahead.

"In the beginning was the Word." The Logos, the Wisdom of God. Before the world is something to fix or manage, it is something spoken. And this Word becomes flesh and makes a home among us.

That is the surprise of Epiphany. God does not send wisdom from a distance. God steps into the mixture. God reveals God-self in a body, in relationship, confusion, and even contradiction. "The light shines in the darkness", John says, "and the darkness does not overcome it".

Darkness *is* named. And it is named so that it is not given dominion. Jesus, as an adult, would often encounter evil. And the first thing he would do in the face of demonic powers *is ask its name.*

In the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step is not self-improvement or resolve, *but acceptance*. A clear, unsparing naming of reality. "I am currently not in control". "Something has power over me". Until the darkness is named, it remains *vague, hidden, and strangely authoritative*. But once it is spoken aloud, once it is brought into the light, it loses its mythic size. It can be *faced, addressed, and shared.*

Epiphany works in much the same way. God does not pretend the darkness is not there. The Gospel is honest about it. Yet in naming it, God refuses to grant it power and dominion. And the first act of wisdom, whether in recovery or in faith, is the courage to say, "this is real". "This is where I am". And therefore, by grace, "this is where healing can begin".

My friends, It looks as if we will always live in a world that is a mixture of good and evil. Jesus called it a field in which wheat and weeds grow alongside each other. We say, "Lord, shouldn't we go and rip out the weeds?" But Jesus says: "No, if you try to do that, you'll probably rip the wheat out along with the weeds. Let both grow alongside each other in the field till harvest" (Matthew 13:24-30).

We need a lot of patience and humility to live with a field of both weeds and wheat, in our world and in our own souls.

This is uncomfortable teaching. We prefer clear lines and quick judgments. The Church, at times, has been far better at telling people whether they are right or where they are wrong, than at helping them walk the narrow and risky path of wisdom.

Wisdom requires patience. It requires humility. It requires humanity. It requires the courage to admit that we may be mistaken, and the grace to learn from that.

The Word made flesh does not eliminate ambiguity. Instead, he enters it. He lives among us, not above us. He shows us a way of being human that is grounded, authentic, free and deeply honest. John, the evangelist, tells us “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (vs.16). Not a single solution, but a steady giving. Enough for now. Enough for the next step.

In a Church that feels increasingly divided and demarcated by boundaries of our own making, a Church willing to dwell in the “grey areas of life” can be deeply life-giving. A Church shaped by faithful individuals, who in turn constitute communities, who keep alive stories of reconciliation and hope. The kind of Church that remembers, and lives, the witness to the very foundations on which this Cathedral Church is built and the ground on which we stand, right now.

We are living in a moment that tempts us toward speed and certainty. Public life is increasingly polarised. Complex questions are reduced to headlines. We are encouraged to choose sides quickly, to speak loudly, and to defend our position at all costs. Yet many of the issues we face now refuse to be solved by simple answers.

We are learning, every day, how fragile our common life really is. We are facing questions about belonging and exclusion, about migration and hospitality, about how we care for the earth without turning care into control. We are wrestling with the impact of technology on attention, truth, and human dignity. We are navigating mental health crises, loneliness, and exhaustion in a culture that rarely slows down long enough to listen.

We are asking what justice looks like when stories collide and contest, and whose voices we have not yet learned how to hear.

These are not black and white problems. They require wisdom.

For individuals, wisdom may begin with curiosity. With learning how to stay in conversation rather than rushing to conclusion. With asking better questions before offering answers. With listening long enough to be changed and holding convictions firmly but gently. Wisdom may look like resisting the pressure to comment on everything and instead choosing to attend carefully to something.

For the Church, wisdom may mean becoming a place where complexity is not feared. A place where disagreement does not automatically lead to division. A place where people are trusted to wrestle, to doubt, and to grow. The Church has an opportunity to model a slower, deeper way of being human. One that values listening, formation and faithfulness.

Such a Church creates spaces for brave listening and courageous storytelling. For space to journey from a fractured past to a shared future, not a certain one, but a shared one.

This is the work of Epiphany wisdom, offering enough light to take the next step. Enough light to remain curious. Enough light to stay together in the grey, trusting that God is still at work there.

John goes on to tell us something rather sobering. “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.”

Light can be resisted.

Wisdom can be refused.

Yet even here the Gospel refuses despair. To all who receive him, *to those who trust instead of control*, he gives the power to become children of God. God gives a new identity. A new beginning.

Here we gather, on this fourth day of January and the world already feels like it's on fire- literally. Venezuela, Palestine, Nigeria, Ukraine...need I say more?

Epiphany hope is not certainty. It is trust. The reign of God, Jesus tells us, is real, but incomplete. Present, but never finished. It cannot be secured by

systems or protected by ideologies. It asks us to stand in a quieter place. A place where *we offer* what we have.

Salt. Leaven. Light.

Not knowing for sure that we are right but trusting that God is faithful and that the little we bring can be used by the Creator *of all that is* to bring about God's reign, God's Kingdom, God's βασιλεία (basileia in Greek) of peace with justice. In the words of that great African saint, Augustine of Hippo: "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not."

There is a striking image used of Jesus by Asian artist and theologian, Choan-Seng Song. He says that Jesus burnt himself out totally, like a candle, to give light to those living under the power of darkness. Not a flashy, loud, dominating type light, but one that is self-giving and enduring light.

This, I believe, is the wisdom Epiphany offers us for the year ahead.

We will live this year, as we do every year, in a world where good and evil grow together and we will find that mixture not only around us, but within us. And yet the Word has made a home here. The light still shines here. That grace is still given, again and again.

So, we begin this year not knowing very much. But we begin with hope. Because the light that shines in the darkness is not extinguished. And that light is enough to walk by.

Grace upon grace. Enough for today. Enough for the year ahead.

A very happy, blessed and safe New Year to you all. **Amen**