We are in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means manifestation, or revealing, or making known – it’s the season of the church’s year when we celebrate the revealing of God’s Saviour, Jesus Christ, to the world! Today, in particular, we recall Jesus’ baptism, when he offered himself to God for life, for ministry, for the sake of salvation. It was a time when God’s glory was revealed – his wonderful life and love for the world.

Today in the cathedral we have invited many of you here this evening to a special service to say ‘thank you’ for all that you do as a Coventry cathedral volunteer – and may I say, before almost anything else, ‘Thank-you’, from the bottom of my heart, for all that you do. Without you, this building would be an empty shell, devoid of life or purpose – with you, it has a beating heart, a job to do, and an abiding place in the hearts of so many of those who visit or know of our work.

We talk quite a lot about Light in Epiphany: ‘Arise, shine, for your light has come, the Glory of God has risen upon you’, is a familiar text for this season. God’s light shines in the world, wherever his work is taking place – his glory is seen wherever something is done for sake of his Kingdom. As I was thinking about this service, and those who serve God’s work in the Cathedral, I found myself thinking of all of you as little lights, shining in the midst of what is sometimes quite a dark city – moving about in your different roles, some behind the scenes, some very visible, but making a wonderful pattern of colour and movement, making manifest God’s love and life.

St. Ireneaus, one of the ancient teachers of the church, had a phrase which has resonated through the ages: ‘the Glory of God is a human being fully alive’. For many of you, I know, volunteering in the cathedral is a significant responsibility, often challenging, sometimes frustrating, but in the end rewarding, because it is part of living life to the fullest. It’s about being part of a team – but more than that, it’s about being part of a community which serves to make God known in the world. A God who welcomes all, and seeks always through Jesus’ cross and resurrection, to restore relationships and broaden that sense of community to be inclusive of everyone.

In the end, it all comes back to Jesus – I’ve been thinking about this again over the past few days as I have been preparing for another speaking engagement, tomorrow evening, when myself and a local Imam will be sharing our understanding of our own faith traditions and inviting questions and discussion from those who come. (It’s in the Chapter House tomorrow night, at 7pm.) The clue is in the name – we are Christians, followers of Christ, the Messiah: Jesus, which means Saviour, child of God and son of Mary. Jesus came to call together a new community, of those who would live at peace with one another and with God, and who would make known God’s way of living in the world. He invites us to follow the way with him, of offering ourselves and all that we have daily to God, and discovering his resources for living the life that he calls us to live. In fellowship with others, we make his love and forgiveness known ... welcoming all, as he has welcomed us.

It’s actually not always easy! I don’t suppose it was easy for Jesus. We know it wasn’t easy for his followers. And it’s not easy for us. We don’t always get on – either with each other, or with the wider public we are called to serve, in Christ’s name. Sometimes, I’m sure, you don’t find it easy making your way here to fulfill the particular task to which you have committed. (And I’m not just talking about the challenges of public transport, or the absence of local parking.) I’m sure you know the story about the mother telling her son it was time to get up and go to school: I don’t want to, he said. Why not? The teachers hate me, the pupils are awful and I’m tired. You’ve got to go – she says. Give me three good reasons, he says. It’s Monday morning, it’s the star of term, and you’re the headmaster!
Yet, we are not simply drawing on our own resources, but the resources of God. We are serving him here, and when we feel tired, or losing that light which we are called to carry, the scriptures encourage us to make our way back to him for fresh vision and energy. The Psalm this evening, Psalm 46, puts it beautifully: Be still, and know that I am God. It’s the Psalm that gave rise to the famous hymn, ‘O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home’. It is that security which we offer here – a space for hope, a space for renewal, a space to find our place in a new community which has God at its centre. Don’t labour for nothing, says Isaiah: come to God, even if you feel you have nothing – you can buy what you need from him without money, but as you offer your lives. ‘Seek the Lord whilst he may be found’ – be a part of what he is doing.

In the end, this is the invitation to us all: to be part of what God is doing. He is rebuilding lives, rekindling hope, sharing love – and for that to continue, we have to make it known, and show that it’s true, by the way that we live.

Later this week, Archbishop Justin is meeting the Primates in Canterbury. That’s not a bunch of orangutans – but the archbishops of the Anglican Church around the world. They face some real challenges – with quite different views, influenced by the cultures from which they come, and the theological interpretations that they bring to urgent contemporary questions, especially around how we should shape our human relationships, they are going to look for a way of being part of what God is doing together. It is my prayer, and the prayer of many, that they will find a way to hold together, to embrace their diversity as a sign of the richness of God’s mercy and grace, and to show the world (or those who are interested) that the community of God is an embracing community which is open to all.

We are called to the same task at a local level here in Coventry ... and you each your part in making that a reality. Thank you!