



Weekly News

Sunday 2nd January 2022

The Epiphany of the Lord

Knowing, loving and following Jesus

Parish Church of St Richard

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Worship at St Richard's during January

All Masses will be celebrated in church, Sunday's Mass will be live-streamed onto the St Richard's Facebook page. During the week, the church will also be open most days for private prayer.

Tuesday 4th Mass 11:00

Wednesday 5th Mass 19:00

Thursday 6th Mass 11:00

Sunday 9th Mass 10:00

Baptism of Christ

Tuesday 11th Mass 11:00

Wednesday 12th Mass 19:00

Thursday 13th Mass 11:00

Sunday 16th Mass 10:00

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Tuesday 18th Mass 11:00

Thursday 20th Mass 11:00

Sunday 23rd Mass 10:00

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Tuesday 25th Mass 11:00

Wednesday 26th Mass 19:00

Thursday 27th Mass 11:00

Saturday 28th Messy Mass 16:30

Sunday 30th Mass 10:00

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who has helped in anyway this Christmas. And thank you from Fr Chris, Carolyn and Sam (*and Murphy!*) for the kind words, cards and gifts we received over the Christmas period; they are all greatly appreciated.

Annual leave

Fr Chris will be taking annual leave from Thursday 6th to 20th January inclusive. During this time, he will not be on email or answering his phone. There will also be no '**Link**' for the next two weeks. Any urgent issues should be brought to the attention of one of the Churchwardens (Mary King: 01444 453941 or Tom Tyler: 07929 413771).

200 Club draw – December

At Tea and Coffee after Mass this morning Fr Chris made the 200 Club draw for December:

The winning numbers are:

3rd Prize – #116 – Melina Leppard

2nd Prize – #49 – Jean Clarke

1st Prize – #77 – Helen Thomas

Congratulations to all the winners!

Ric's Bench

Ric's Bench sessions this week are on:

Monday 19:00 – 21:00

Friday 14:00 – 16:00

Friday 18:30 – 20:30 (*Young adults*)

Foodbank donations

The church will be open for Foodbank donations on Tuesday at 10:00 – 12:00 and Friday 14:00 – 16:00.

Of your charity, please pray for, those in need:

Mimi Palmer, Hannah Hales, Paul Moore, Christopher Grimwood, Linda Miller, Sheila Jobson, Doreen Sparks, Adrian Taylor, Pamela Waugh, Una Wade, Jean McCarthy, Pat Longhurst, Michael Langford-Jackson, Fr Michael Gudgeon, Dawson, Jean Padgham, Richard Parker, Gillian Smith, Shirley Swyer, Halcyon Clarke, Geoffrey Billington, Fr Peter Yates, Richard Clarke, Robert Padginton, Maria Firth, Karen Guy, Ken Cooper, Brigid Brand, Fr Kevin Eastall, Ann Eastall, David Chapman, Terry Littlewood, Baby Nyle Mahmood, Becky, Jenny Nye, Charlotte, David, Rob, Andy, Natasha, Leah, Hailey, her brother, Sharon, Eddy and Nick.
If you would like anyone added to the prayer list over the next two weeks speak with one of the churchwardens.

Those who have died recently and those whose anniversary falls around this time of year:

w/b 2nd January: 2nd) Alice Lerpiniere, Dorothy Briegel, 3rd) Harold Adkins (pr), Kenneth Cole, Madelaine Allen, 4th) Harry Steer, Hilda Watson, Noel Mercer, Derek Coombes (pr), Doreen Wreford-Howard, 6th) Emily Truelove, Donald Simmonds, Marjorie Stammers, Ruby Sopp, 7th) Vera Thomas, Charles Crofts (pr), 8th) Richard Hetherington (pr), Winifred Pickard, Jane Mercer, Dorothy Fowler.

w/b 9th January: 9th) Elizabeth Eggart, Norman Dix, 10th) Thomas Brown (pr), Sr Evelyn, Reg Wells, Casimir Jurkowski, 11th) Reginald Twinning, 14th) Michael Crofts, Sr Monica, 15th) Ernest Knott, Jean Boyle, Tony Webb-Bowen.

w/b 16th January: 16th) Horace Worden, 17th) Lilian Titheradge, Enid Lovell, 18th) Winifred Anderson, Tom & Margaret Harrison, 19th) Alan Kemp, Sister Ruth, 21st) Violet Knott, Dorothy Crofts.

Fr Chris' Sermon – The Epiphany of the Lord

The wise men got me into big trouble this year! At the Nativity celebration, during our version of the Game Show the 'Chase', one of the questions was: 'how many wise men were there?' The answer to which, *according to the bible*, is: "We don't know". Well, after Mass on Christmas morning, Beth took to me to task, and asked why I didn't know that there were three wise men. I argued (*I can't help feeling in vain!*) that the number of Maji is not actually mentioned, but of course legend has it that there were three, as evidenced in our nativity scene, on cards, in certain Carols, and in the names: Casper, Melchior and Balthazar. And Matthew details the three specific gifts of Gold, Frankincense and myrrh. I decided not to wind things up further with Beth by asking how the wise men travelled, the answer to which is also "we don't know", although camel is probably quite an educated guess, all we really know is that the Maji came during the reign of King Herod and they came from the East to Jerusalem. And they came to a house. as is reflected in our nativity scene

It's widely thought among scholars that the visitors were from the Parthian Empire, which was centred around present day Iran and Iraq, and that the Magi were Zoroastrian priest-astrologers from Persia.

In our first reading and our psalm there are some forward looking references to the Epiphany. In Isaiah we heard: "*The nations come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness.*" And, with a prophetic nod to the mode of transport, "*camels in throngs will cover you, and dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; everyone in Sheba will come, bringing gold and incense and singing the praise of the Lord.*" And in the psalm "*The kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him.*"

Over the centuries a combination of scholarly research, biblical exegesis and handed down tradition has created the story which we enjoy and celebrate today. What we have come to accept as part of the whole Christmas story is, *a lot of it*, based on conjecture. But this really doesn't matter, as long as we do not lose site of the central truths and reality. Because the importance lies not in the historicity and the human details of the event, but in the theology and what God's message is in all this, and what it means to us today.

Like so much of Scripture, what is written in this individual episode speaks at different levels and defies time. On the one hand the wise men did undertake a physical journey across a thousand or so miles, but they also underwent a spiritual journey and a transformation.

Matthew uses the Magi to highlight the essential truth, and fulfilment of the prophecies, that God's love and redemption was to apply to all people's, not just the people of Israel. The epiphany story can also relate directly to us and our own individual Christian journeys, not least in what we will encounter along the way. I can't help but feel that the Magi, when they reached the house, must have thought "*surely this can't be the right place!*". There's no way that what they saw would have met the expectations they had. They had travelled for weeks even months (some say 2 years) to bring precious gifts to a King, the King of the Jews. Surely, they would have been expecting to arrive at a Palace, with all the attendant trappings of royalty. Instead, after visiting Herod's palace (a place far more likely to be the birthplace of an earthly King) they end up at a house and see a child with his humble mother. And what do the wise men do? They don't turn around and say: "*sorry we must have come to the wrong place*". They fall to their knees in homage; full of awe!

And then they present their precious and regal gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. They have followed the star, the light, their sign, and against all reasonable human logic, and despite what their eyes and expectations must have been telling them, they recognise Jesus, for who and what he is. They worship him, and they give to him.

They were called by God, they follow His call, they worship Him and they give to him.

And that simple formula should apply equally to each one of us. We're called, we follow, we worship, we give. The way in which Jesus calls each one of us may be very different and may be completely unexpected to us, and here we should learn from the Magi – just because it is not what we expected, does not mean it's not real.

There is no set pattern to how God calls people; in the same way that there is no template for a perfect Christian. We can sometimes make the mistake of trying to mould ourselves into what we see as a good Christian, by looking at those around us, rather than looking directly to Jesus himself, and what he is asking us to do.

And there are a couple of other parallels between our own journeys and that of the magi. The wise men keep their eyes fixed on the star to guide them. It is unrealistic to think that their long journey was without unplanned incident or problems, but they kept going. In the same way we must keep our eyes focused on the light of Christ, despite what life will inevitably throw at us along the way. Secondly, although we don't know for sure how many wisemen there were, we do know that they were not on their own – wisemen, not wiseman!

They had company on their journey. And, being members of Christ's church, we also do not travel alone. We each have a personal relationship with Jesus, but we also journey with other people at our side to encourage and support us. And we should offer and support too. When the Magi found Jesus they gave him Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, each with its own distinct symbolism. We all have different gifts to give (each we have received from him in the first place), but one common gift we have, is our hearts and ourselves. As Christina Rossetti wrote in her poem "In the Bleak Mid-Winter"

*What can I give Him, Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man I would do my part;
Yet what I can, I give Him - Give my heart.*

To truly give Jesus our hearts, is to commit to love him and to love everyone around us too. And from that will come wonderful transformation and the kind of delight experienced by the Wisemen – however many of them there were!