

Dear friends,

I hope you all had a special Christmas and are now relaxing as far as is possible. All the Christmas services across all three churches were well attended and I was able to be involved with all three which was very pleasing.

Just as society was starting to get apoplectic with fear (again) we kept our heads, carried on and delivered what we are here to deliver.

We are keeping the rumour of God alive in our little corner of east Devon pretty well in my view and as the new year dawns we have a solid base to work from, which given what we have gone through over the last two years (in all respects) is pretty good going and we should be proud of ourselves.

Sunday 2nd January – The Epiphany

We have transferred the festival of the Epiphany to the closest Sunday because this most important of Christian festivals deserves to be seen and understood by as many people as possible. I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's, Fr. Peter will be at the 9.30am at All Saints and John Archibald will be leading a service of the word at St. Michael's.

Isaiah 60: 1-6. Zion is bidden to “rise” and “shine”, meaning that they break out of their lethargy and despair and reflect the light of God. Then other nations will be drawn by the light of God and bring tribute to Zion, not as subject peoples but as fellow worshippers of God.

Ephesians 3: 1-12. For “Zion” in Isaiah read “the church” in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The essential nature of the Epiphany season is explained here as the mystery of Christ being revealed and perceived. Christianity comes in two parts. Part one are all the stories and part two are understanding what they mean at a deep theological, societal, community and personal level.

Matthew 2: 1-12. For “other nations” coming to pay homage and worship God, read “the Magi” coming from Persia bringing their symbolic gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh usually interpreted as meaning the kingship of Jesus Christ (Gold), his priestly intermediary nature in bring God close (Frankincense) and the eternal significance of his death (Myrrh used for anointing dead bodies).

The lighter side!

I dole out this cartoon every Epiphany simply because I think it is so clever and still makes me laugh.



Thought for the Day

So, we have heard all the stories and sung all the carols so many times before, but what do they really mean, for me, for us, for the world? Addressing that question is the essential purpose of what we call Epiphany. We still use the word to describe a sudden flash of insight and revelation. Many Biblical stories fit the bill but the main ones that have always been used by the church are the visit of the Magi (the preferred story in the western church) and the Baptism of Christ (the preferred story in the Eastern church).

Both episodes tell us so much about the true meaning of the "Christ mystery" as Paul describes it in Ephesians this Sunday. And in telling us what these things mean for Jesus also tells us what it means for us. Our understanding of the nature and purposes of God and his creation change when we

encounter this “Christ mystery”. Our understanding of our own place within this created order changes when we encounter this “Christ mystery”.

We start to discern that what is true for Jesus is also true for us. At that most basic level, when the voice of the Father says of Jesus “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased” we discern as John writes in his gospel that we too are children of God.

Making that change in perception a fully functioning and integral part of your identity is a lifetime’s work but is the strongest antidote to the identity politics that are disfiguring the western world at the moment. My prior identity that trumps all other identities is that I am intimately connected to the father and therefore also intimately connected to all other parts of his creation.

The Prayer for Today is written by Jan Berry

**God of gold, we seek your glory
The richness that transforms our drabness into colour,
And brightens our dullness with vibrant light,
Your wonder and joy at the heart of all life.
God of incense, we offer you our prayer.
Our spoken and unspeakable longings, our questioning of truth,
Our search for your mystery deep within.
God of Myrrh, we cry out to you in our suffering.
The pain of all our rejections and bereavements,
Our baffled despair at undeserved suffering,
Our rage at continuing injustice.
And we embrace you, God-with-us,
In our wealth, in our yearning, in our anger and our loss.**

Love and peace,
Martin