

Dear friends,

Happy New year!

Our first services of 2022 on Sunday were the Epiphany, a season when the true import and significance of the entire “Christ event” is presented to us progressively over the next few weeks. These Sunday gospel stories include the visit of the Magi (just gone), the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, the turning of water into wine, Jesus self-identifying himself with the prophesy of Isaiah, and ending with the presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas).

These are the most insightful and revelatory stories in the Bible pointing us in the right direction to understand the true significance of Christ and the corresponding story of humanity.

All our services were so well attended over the holiday period considering the effects of the latest Covid scare, even last Sunday -which was sandwiched between new year and the Monday bank holiday so hopefully a good indication of our health and well being as a community going forward.

Sunday 9th January – The Baptism of Christ

Reverend Colin Randall will preside at both morning services at St. Peter’s, and I will be presiding at the 9.30am service at All Saints and the 11am at St. Michael’s and also at the 6pm service of Choral Evensong at St. Peter’s.

Isaiah 43: 1-7. A wonderful and expansive piece of writing that oozes Love and protection for God’s people who will be set free and gathered up from all points of the compass and gathered into God’s loving arms.

Acts 8: 14-17. A contentious piece to this day drawing a line between those who had received the Holy Spirit and those who had been merely baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. At the very least it points to the difference between knowing something intellectually and knowing it to be true in your heart. The difference between knowing something which lies outside of your lived experience and it making a life-changing impact on your life.

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22. While the visit of the Magi is the main Epiphany story in the western church, in the eastern church it is this one – the baptism of Christ when the essential relationship between the Father and his son, God

and humanity is laid bare. “You are my child, the beloved. With you I am well pleased.”

Count your blessings.

One of my favourite songs is “Everybody hurts” by REM, which articulates the essential human truth that we all suffer, we will all be moved to tears, and sometimes we will all be overwhelmed by grief, regrets or our own shortcomings.

There is no avoiding this and sometimes it can hit you at very unexpected times and even when ostensibly everything is going just fine.

Given that this is inevitable and will happen anyway from time to time – it happened to me over new year – it is good to have a coping mechanism for the aftermath of such thoughts.

During it, nothing anyone says or does seems to break through the thick fog of despair but eventually reality does shine through and that is when it is good to do the old fashioned tried and tested exercise of “counting your blessings.”

Even people in the direst of circumstances have things they can be grateful for. Most of us have so much to be grateful for that when we realise how much we have it is faintly embarrassing that we ever got downcast in the first place!

Starting with the basics, love and relationships are foundational, and trump any material or financial concerns. To quote another favourite song “The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is to love and be loved in return”. We all need human love but when that is missing, remember that God always loves you.

We are also surrounded by natural beauty, a real blessing, which can be found anywhere – even in a city street – as well as the more obvious areas of natural beauty.

Our foundational relationship to our creator which is a familial Father and child one is a bedrock of our sense of well being and that relationship needs to be practiced and continually reinforced because human beings forget so very easily when they are not continually reminded of eternal truths.

This is the rationale for all regular worship, prayer and other spiritual practices that are designed to imbed these truths into our souls.

Having what the Buddhists call a “practice”, a personal and regular spiritual set of formal time set aside for things that speak to us is important to deepen and make effective our faith. Not so onerous that they put you off before you start, mind you, but even tiny things done regularly all help to remind you of and reinforce certain essential eternal truths. Those truths are that I am a child of God, I am loved, forgiven and with me God is well pleased. Each individual needs those same truths to come alive in their hearts and minds. As Harry Williams CR (RIP) once famously said. “Truth only has the power of truth once it becomes true for you”

The prayer for Today is by David Payne (Based on Deuteronomy 12: 9-14)

**Yes, I the shepherd God, the great I AM
Have journeyed with you through your desert, precious lamb
There on dark calvary I shed my blood
And gave my life for you, The lamb of God
For bread of life I gave you finest wheat
And for your thirst the gift of wine so sweet
Red blood of grape, you drank, crushed on the precious vine
O taste and see, this is my love divine
I in the wilderness and the desert place
Have come to you, my wounded child, with grace,
Grace now sufficient I your Lord am nigh
I smile on you in love the “apple of my eye”.**

Love and peace,
Martin

Please note my new email address is vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk