

Dear friends,

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

On Sunday we celebrated the **EPIPHANY**. The Christmas & Epiphany seasons bleed into each other which is why we will use the same liturgy up until Candlemas - so effectively during the whole of January.

Despite the new lockdown rules that were announced on Monday, **church worship, weddings and funerals can still go ahead** as before. This is plainly stated in the official Government advice, so in effect the new societal lockdown makes no impact on our live service provision at all (so far!). The situation is fluid of course and things change quickly so obviously I will keep abreast of all new developments. The only way within the current Government rules that worship would have to stop in the RMC is if Bishop Robert says that it should. All C of E priests in Exeter Diocese swore an oath of canonical obedience to that office and currently we can go forward as planned. Of course, the fear factor, and the rate of transmission are both skyrocketing so if you have any qualms whatsoever about coming to church, do please stay at home until the situation improves which hopefully won't be too long. We have already proved during the first lockdown that the RMC is resilient and can well withstand these temporary problems.

I have recorded my reflection on the event that introduces the season of Epiphany which is the visit of the Magi (often called three kings or wise men). What does this event mean and tell us about Christ? If you'd like to listen to it just click on this link. <https://youtu.be/mVwJdg1VW8o>
Alternatively, if you'd prefer to read it just click on this link to my Blog. <https://revmartinjacques.blogspot.com/2021/01/epiphany-what-does-it-mean-to-proclaim.html>

Sunday 10th January – The Baptism of Christ

This Sunday I will preside at the 8am and 10am services at St. Peter's and Rev. Karen Young will preside at the 9.30 service at All Saints and the 11am at St. Michael's.

Genesis 1: 1-5. This creation story was obviously chosen because it refers to the spirit of God sweeping over the waters – except that in the NRSV translation it says “wind” instead of Spirit. This is because wind and spirit are the same word in Hebrew – Ruach - (like the spirit at Pentecost came as the “blowing of a violent wind”). A good comparison because like the wind, you cannot see the Spirit but you can clearly see its effect.

Acts 19: 1-7. John’s “baptism of repentance” lacked the fullness of the revelation of the baptism of Christ so these early followers of Jesus needed to receive the “full revelation”. The fullness of Christian baptism is an immersion into the ubiquitous Spirit of God who is “all in all”. The evidence that the Spirit has been appropriated can be seen in the effects which are manifested. “Speaking in tongues and prophesying” became a shorthand way of describing the moment when the penny dropped and the full import of Christ became a living reality for a person.

Mark 1: 4-11. Jesus was about 30 years old when he submitted to baptism by John in the river Jordan – the event that ignited his active 3-year ministry on earth. What happened then was a “theophany” - a God event full of symbolism. The heavens were torn apart, the same Spirit that had hovered over the waters in the creation story alighted upon Jesus in the form of a dove and the voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as God’s son - meaning his exact image and likeness on earth. Interestingly the voice is addressed directly to Jesus -You are my son – so is more like an internal validation. This is changed in Matthew’s gospel to a public pronouncement “*This* is my son” that could be heard by others.

The Lighter side!



Musical interlude.

I have always loved this song. I need to hear it when I get to be too forensic, too logical which can crowd out all art, music, imagination, mystery, humour..."The Logical song" by Supertramp. Enjoy. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_NGuITmh88

Thought for the day.

I've always been attracted by the story of the visitation by the Magi. "Magi" stands out as the only obviously foreign word in Matthew's gospel. It is a word with a distinct meaning – that of a Zoroastrian holy man from what is present day Iran. Zoroastrians still exist in Iran as a small minority group within the Islamic republic.

There is a pleasing symmetry in that the Zoroastrian religion was also looking for a Messiah that would be "born of a virgin" and the Magi would have been skilled astronomers/astrologers into the bargain. There is also the powerful testimony that when the Persians attacked and pillaged the Holy Land in the

middle ages, they destroyed everything they could but spared the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem because they saw murals depicting the Magi on the walls wearing recognisably Persian dress. There is of course no mention of how many there were either, just that there were three gifts, which led to later medieval traditions like giving the “kings” names

William Dalrymple, my favourite historian, on an exploration of the silk road once went in search of local traditions still extant about such an epic trip that happened long ago. Some evidence was turned up but perhaps it is best if the whole episode is surrounded by an air of mystery. I love mystery, with tantalising hints, suggestions and possibilities. It provides such a welcome change from a rather sterile, rationalistic, Western mindset where all the I's and t's must be dotted and crossed and is much more in line with our life experience that there is always more to life than can be explained by pure rationality.

The Prayer for Today is 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 loss

Love and peace,

Martin

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