

Dear friends,

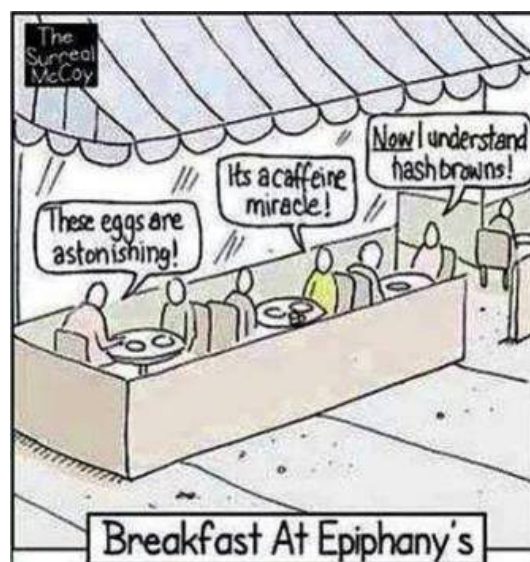
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We enjoyed a wonderful Christmas across the whole RMC with some truly great congregations – so much larger than last year. The services I led were very well attended and joyous and I have heard great reports from others about the others across our community. The Christingle service in St. Peter's particularly was bursting at the seams with over 280 adults and 80 children, so well done to Jean Burrows for not just coping but excelling there, and I want to thank everybody in all three churches for pulling together to make sure everybody had a great Christian experience. People are more inclined to want to commemorate and celebrate after a grim couple of years obviously.

We spent the intervening week between Christmas and new year in Yorkshire (Isn't York a lovely city!) and travelled back to Devon via Sutton Coldfield in the Midlands in Murky, rainy, depressing conditions ready to celebrate new year in East Budleigh and preside at a full-strength (Why am I surprised?) congregation at St. Peter's on New Year's Day which also welcomed people from Temple Methodist church which didn't have a service that day.

The only complication for me (and tragedy for the families involved) was that over the festive period four funerals have appeared and need to be addressed. Still, after a frenetic Bank holiday Monday Morning, everything is starting to look a little clearer now.

Just to note that Fran is off on holiday until next weekend so there will be no pew sheet next week.



Sunday 8th January – The Baptism of Christ

I will be presiding at all Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively. Archdeacon Trevor Jones is presiding at St. Peter's and we expect our current archdeacon of Exeter, Andrew Beane to be joining Trevor as well. The official day that marks the start of Epiphany is Friday 6th January and we mark liturgically the start of the season this Sunday with perhaps the greatest Epiphany of them all – the baptism of Christ - where Jesus has his identity confirmed by his Father and hears the words "This is my son, the beloved, with him I am well pleased"

Isaiah 42: 1-9. The first of the so-called servant songs in Isaiah and the speaker is God himself talking about his servant whose mission is universal in scope (justice to the *nations*) and not just domestic. He will work quietly and gently, without fanfare, but gentleness mustn't be confused with weakness. In 41:8-9, this servant is identified as Israel (in context) but was actually fulfilled in the personification of Israel, Jesus Christ.

Acts 10: 34-43. This episode with Peter, tells one of the stories of the widening out of the gospel from just being particular to the Jews to reaching "all the nations". Peter we can imagine may have been a little resistant, but the mounting evidence forces him to exclaim that "God shows no partiality". Peter notes that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power (at his baptism) and went around doing good. Peter also preaches that Jesus was raised from the dead and that the apostles are witnesses of all these things.

Matthew 3: 13-17. In Matthew's version, the internal voice of God heard by Jesus in Mark's gospel (You are my Son) becomes audible and discernible to others (He is my Son). The personification of the Spirit of God becomes a Dove that "alights on him" when he was about thirty years old, roughly 3 years before his crucifixion. This is the starting point of Jesus' active mission to reveal God's true nature and purposes to a hungry and waiting world.

Thought for the Day

The event traditionally seen as the keynote event of Epiphany in the West used to be the visit of the Magi, or three wise men or “kings” as they are also known. Then in 1955, that changed when the Vatican downgraded that particular feast and the “Baptism of Christ” became the main feast after the feast of the Epiphany on the 6th January, bringing the West into line with the Eastern church. The reasons for doing that are not stated, but might be based in the fact that originally there was quite a bit of embarrassment about Jesus being baptised by John, based on the stated belief that Jesus being sinless would not have required baptism at all and on the very human level that it might suggest that Jesus was subordinate to John the Baptist. This embarrassment stretches right back to the pages of the Bible, and the gospel writers use various strategies to avoid having to say plainly that Jesus was baptised by John, but the fact that it is there, despite the awkwardness, lends validity to the story that Jesus was indeed baptised by John. Both stories are beautiful and stand on their own with valuable things to say and we are blessed that we have so many stories that make up such a rich tapestry with the ability to touch different people from different cultures at different times in their lives.

The Prayer for Today is taken from a catholic prayer book. In the week when Pope Benedict died and Pope Francis becomes the first Pope for 600 years to preside at the funeral of his predecessor we prayer for the universal church. May God’s Spirit empower us through 2023

God our Father

In all the churches scattered throughout the world

You show forth the one, Holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Through the gospel and the eucharist

Bring your people together in the Holy Spirit

And guide us in your Love.

Make us a sign of your Love for all people,

And help us to show forth

The living presence of Christ in the world.

Love and peace,

Martin