

Reflections



Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

Reflection for 1st Sunday of Advent

Comfort and Joy



'You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.'
(1 Corinthians 1.7-8).

What are you doing for Christmas? Every year at this time, this question is posed numerous times in conversations between colleagues, neighbours and friends. But in Advent 2020 the question has a different ring to it than in previous Advents. The uncertainties of the pandemic mean that the question not only embodies expectation but also dread.

Expectation and dread are two central themes of Advent - the first four weeks of church's year. It's a time when the expectation involved in preparing to celebrate Christ's first coming is mixed with the dread of preparing for his second coming as king and judge. For the four great themes of Advent, often called the four last things, are death, judgement, heaven and hell.

Hardly fashionable themes! We will not hear them in the songs on the playlist when we push our trolley around the supermarket, or turn on the

TV. But the message of judgement is ultimately a message of hope and good news. Judgement involves fairness and liability. If actions have no consequences, people can abuse other people without fear of reprisal. Judgement means the abuser is held accountable for their words and deeds.

The certainty of judgement comes with a wonderful assurance that the one who judges us is the one whose incarnation means he knows what it is to be human. And just look at what the Apostle Paul says in the verse cited above from today's Epistle reading. We know from the rest of that letter that the recipients of it is a group of Christians marred by strife, pride, sexual misconduct, gluttony, and disorderly worship. Yet he reassures them that God will keep them firm in the faith, so that eventually they will come to stand 'blameless' before God.

This total acquittal of all our guilt is what makes Advent, and the great celebration of the incarnation to which it draws us, a time of great comfort and joy!

So let us pray in the words of today's collect:

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Rev Dr Peter Heslam

Reflection for 2nd Sunday of Advent

Mark 1: 1-8



People from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to John in the wilderness' (taken from Mark 1, v5)

Reading this verse, I am intrigued to know what would make these people go to the wilderness?

Some have come from the city of Jerusalem. That is a journey of about 20 miles, that's not an afternoon's stroll! Some came from the surrounding countryside, leaving others to care for livestock and farms. There were also people passing through the area on their business travels, as it was a trade route. They may have made a detour. But why?

They had obviously got wind of this strange man and his strange behaviour. Were they hoping for a freak show? Were they satisfying their curiosity? This man was a preacher, was he the one of whom they had heard in the stories passed down the generations? Had the Messiah really come now?

Later, when John the Baptist is in prison, and his disciples are asking Jesus if he (Jesus) is the Messiah, Jesus asks the same question.

(Matt 11:7-10) Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone dressed in soft robes?

What then did you go out to see – a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet – a messenger'.

I have another question... Why didn't John travel to the city and towns and into the countryside?

Firstly, it was the place and lifestyle into which he felt God had called him. His life was solely focussed on the prophetic ministry he had been given. *'Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near'. (v3)*

John is living near the Jordan River, and for him, steeped in his understanding of the Scriptures, the river would have had great significance. It was the river through which Joshua led the Israelites as they escaped from captivity in Egypt. As they reached the opposite side of the river, having walked on dry ground with the water parting, they realised they had crossed a frontier. They had left the old life behind and were heading into something new.

No matter what motivated those people to go out to John, they had an urge to make that journey. Something (or someone) was drawing them there to hear John's message. Could you have put yourself out to make this detour in your day, taking time away from usual routines of home and work?

That is what these days of Advent invite us to do. Is God still calling his people to repentance? Yes, but in order that we can let go the old to make room to grow deeper into God, and more eager to celebrate Jesus' birth.

How do we feel about that invitation? Would we go with expectations, with intrigue, with doubt?

Would we go eagerly, reluctantly, or as if compelled? This is an invitation to put something aside intentionally; moving out from our 'cities' or 'workplaces' ready to listen to God's message each day. Each of our

wilderness times will look different: a five minute break with a 'do-not-disturb notice on the door'; a walk up your road; a sit in the park. God will draw you to where and when, if you ask.

However much time you find in this way – you will have been 'on a retreat'!

A suggestion...

Draw a sketch of a road and mark each day of this week along it.

At the end of each day draw/ record in some way what you put aside to respond, and what you discovered. It's not homework – it's noticing how you have responded to God's persuasion.

*Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert
And speak tenderly to her.*

*There I will give her back her vineyards,
And will make the Valley of Achor a
door of hope.*

*And she will sing as in the days of her
youth,
As in the day she came up out of Egypt.*

Hosea 2 v 14 & 15 (for Achor read 'trouble')

Canon Kate Aylmer

Reflection for 3rd Sunday of Advent

Waiting... but not in vain



Advent is a time of waiting
Zechariah and Elizabeth were waiting...
Mary was waiting...
Simeon and Anna were waiting...
John the Baptist was waiting.
Now the world is waiting...

We are not good at waiting.
We are impatient and fearful of being made to wait.
We want life to happen now
Instant gratification
Instant answers
Instant resolution
God has made us a promise
We are not waiting in vain
We know God will come
Be among us
Emmanuel

The Old Testament teaches us to wait
Seven hundred years
From the prophets to the Messiah
Always believing
Always hoping

Bringing good news
Liberty
And healing

Now we can pause
Listen
Watch and wait...
Christ is coming
Christmas is coming

*So, prepare a way in the desert,
A cradle in the hay,
A meeting place in the market place,
A table in an upstairs room,
A cross on a hill,
A grave in a garden,
A throne in your heart as in heaven.
For now again,
I will bend down and remember you.
I will answer your prayer,
And your waiting will end in joy.*

Lucy Holden

Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Advent

Reading: Luke 1.26-38 and the Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55)



On the fourth Sunday of Advent, so close to the Christmas and yet still in the season of waiting, we light the last candle on the outer ring of our Advent Wreath and we remember Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Having remembered the stories of patriarchs and prophets; we settle now into a room, in the town of Nazareth. We can only imagine what Mary was doing; perhaps going about her daily chores, perhaps baking, perhaps quiet in a time of prayer. But suddenly, the room is filled with light and an angel stands before her and says 'Greetings, favoured one. The Lord is with you'.

What was it that meant Mary was favoured? Was it that she was particularly devout? Had she earned God's favour in some way? Was she well respected in her neighbourhood? Somehow, I doubt that. Because we know that God often chooses the most unlikely of people to be part of God's story; just look at the evidence in the bible! And the beautiful song, the Magnificat, that Mary sings in response to the growing child in her womb, is hardly the song of someone singing

from the comfortable centre of the establishment. It is, instead, the song of someone who has sat on the margins, and looked through the windows of the privileged, and has suddenly been told that, against all the odds, she is worthy and favoured and God is with her.

Before she says yes, she is favoured. Before she promises to be the servant of the Lord, God is with her. And perhaps it is this knowledge, the knowledge of God's presence with her and God's favour of her, that gives her the strength to take God's hand, give her affirmation and journey into the unknown.

This advent, we have journeyed in ways so different than we might have usually and we know that this Christmas will also bring many changes. But within all the adjustments and unknowns we've had this year, the Angel's message to Mary is still the same; *you are favoured and the Lord is with you*. And it is a message for each of us too. Because whether or not you feel worthy enough, or feel like you've had a holy enough advent and whether or not you are full of joy for the season, or are struggling to find enthusiasm for the celebration ahead. God is with you. God is with you and all of us; in the weariness, the loneliness, the confusion and the anxiety of this pandemic. And so in these last few days of advent we say again; O Come O Come Emmanuel. God with us, come.

Revd Chris Campbell

Reflection for Christmas Day

'This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' Luke: 2.12



At Christmas we celebrate a world made new. Having journeyed with the patriarchs, the prophets, John the Baptist and the Blessed Virgin Mary, through Advent, we welcome the Christ child – the incarnate Son of God, ‘wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. The world may awake to a different kind of unwrapping – the unwrapping of presents – but here we welcome and give adoration at the stable of the greatest gift of all, God’s incarnate Son, wrapped in swaddling bands.

As the early Christian theologian St Maximus the Confessor put it: ‘the mystery of the incarnation of the word contains in itself the whole meaning of the riddles and symbols of scripture, the whole significance of visible and invisible creatures.’ In other words here, as we bow down and worship, in awe and wonder, we glimpse the hidden mystery of God: ‘who spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways’ (says Hebrews) ‘but in these last days has spoken to us by a Son’. Or as St Paul puts it, reflecting on this mystery to the Church at Ephesus, ‘With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will’ - hidden through past ages in God, but now made known to us.

The question is, then, how do we make sense of this great truth for our lives today... how do we live and abide in his presence (word made flesh) now, not just today – of all days – but throughout the year ahead? How do we embrace our great salvation, and live in its light all the days of our life, and on into eternal life?

Firstly, Christmas reminds us that our salvation – God with us, as he is and was in Jesus – is pure gift (something beyond our imagining, and utterly undeserved), and all we can do, in prayer and worship and trust in Him, is to open our hearts to receive and abide in this gift. And it's as we pray, as we take time to be in his presence, through the Holy Spirit, that we begin to live from this mystery. So salvation (God's incarnate presence) is pure gift.

Secondly, here we are offered (in the mystery of faith) something which makes sense of the complex riddle of our existence and of all human knowledge and Biblical revelation. It may be hard for us, in a sceptical age, and one (conversely) in which others favour a narrow fundamentalism which dismisses other arenas of knowledge, to trust that the incarnation somehow makes sense of all knowledge and experience. But Christian faith, we're reminded, is (in the end) intelligible, and is ultimately trustworthy. For me we glimpse that word or divine reason, present in all creation, and reflected in the great world faiths, fully realised and revealed in the person of Jesus Christ: and to Him we are invited to give our allegiance, in mind and heart and will. So the birth of Christ fulfils the light of faith and reason.

Thirdly, Christmas draws us (having dared to come to God in prayer and to affirm the light of faith) to something altogether more practical, namely to glimpse his presence, in others, which means that all whom we meet are worthy of our respect, our love, our attention, even as human beings (like us) on the long and often painful journey of redemption and salvation. *'For the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have beheld his glory, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.'*

May we, as we unwrap our presents, meditate on the greatest gift of all, the child, wrapped in swaddling bands, laying in a manger. And may we offer him the offering of heart and mind and will, in his service.

Revd James Shakespeare

Reflection for 1st Sunday of Christmas

God with us: an eternal and everlasting fellowship

'Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be Strong and Courageous.' (Daniel 10.19)

'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—2 this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—3 we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.' (1 John 1:1-3)

The Christmas season brings into sharp relief the incarnational mission of God. The first moment where God is truly seen. But in this reading the Apostle John asks us to bring back into our memory the fact that this new reality, stands on the shoulders of the eternal reality, that this Jesus, now coming to us as a baby, was present at the beginning of all things. Physicality brings a reality to things which up to this point might only have existed within the abstract of our mind. It creates a sense of presence that can be comforting and provide understanding and strength.

Earlier on in the year the Tuesday morning bible study group studied the book of Daniel. In Daniel Chapter 10 we find verse 19, "Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be Strong and Courageous." These words, spoken to Daniel by an ever-present God brings to him a moment of comfort during a time of great stress. But it is only possible for these words to bring comfort because Daniel knows personally the one who speaks them. As a father I know the importance of being that source of comfort for my children. It is a beautiful gift to see my Daughter Anah being herself strong and courageous. But I find that she is at her strongest and most confident when she knows I am there with her. She knows in that moment that I will keep her safe, that my watching over her will ensure she will come to no harm. My daughter is comforted by the presence of her father just as Daniel in Chapter 10 is comforted by the presence of the Father.

But though certainly very present, God is not in fact physically there. This physical presence can only be found following the events of Christmas day. But look at the words of John, "we declare to you what was from the

beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen...". As Christians, we can find great comfort within John's words. His words echo the eternal and everlasting nature of God, the one who was present with Danial in distant lands, physically walked with his disciples along the shores of the beach, and now, through the coming of his Holy Spirit, dwells within those who call him lord. John's words reflect the ever deepening, every closer relationship that God has with his people.

Presence, incarnation, indwelling, the journey of God's mission toward a deep and perfect union. God ever-present within the old testament, incarnated within the Gospels and now indwelling through his Holy Spirit. What joy it is the know that throughout time Gods intention has always been to move ever closer to us.

What is the fruit of John's lesson to us? We find the answer to this in verse 3, that we may share in fellowship with God, and with each other. Fellowship more often than not is built out of commonality, something that we all posses which binds us together. Certain hobbies, through join interest produces enthusiasts' clubs; a variety of sports require a group of individuals to work together in order for play to commence. The gift of a shared interest can produce great moments of fellowship.

As those walking the way of Jesus Christ, we possess something of this same commonality. Our common sharing however cannot be put into the category of an interest, it is far deeper, more profound. An interest in a hobby or a sport may produce great friends, but the fruit of Christian fellowship produces family, brother, and sister in the family of God. It is a fellowship that centres not upon shared interest, but shared living. It is a fellowship centres upon the relationship we all share with "The Father and with his Son Jesus Christ". It binds us together in community and prayer so that we may be the fruit of Gods eternal presence for each other.

As we walk with God, so also, we walk with each other, learn from each other, comfort, cry, and love with each other. We do this because, like Daniel we know the one who calls us into this fellowship, the one who makes known that we are safe so that we can, with strength and courage be in that eternal and familial fellowship, God and us, the Church.

Tom Owen, Ordinand

Reflection for the Epiphany

'Star of wonder, star of night... Guide us to thy perfect light.'

Matthew 2. 1-12: the Visit of the Wise Men



Where is the space for wonder in our otherwise busy lives?

We have just traversed the holy season of Advent, a time of watching and waiting for the coming Messiah. But all too easily this waiting season of penitence becomes a time of rushing and shopping and premature feasting. Somehow we easily miss the discipline of wonder, of ‘beholding’ the things of God, and we fast-forward to the story’s climax, missing the vital spiritual journey of getting there. Our whole culture mitigates against such wonderment and staying with the moment – where God is. We need to occupy a space of being and adoration, looking and listening for the signs of God, perhaps where we expect it least.

Epiphany offers another such holding space, a holy season of celebration of the light ‘come into the world’. It may be a ‘white’ season, rather than a ‘purple’ one, but it still offers us a space to be and to wonder, before the decorations go back into the box for another year - an

opportunity to worship at the manger, with the wise men, the shepherds and the angels.

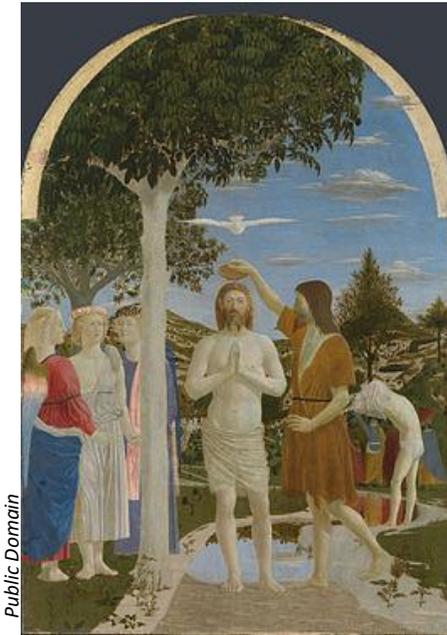
I remember a monk once explaining to me that Epiphany really is at the heart of Christianity, because here we are invited to glimpse the manifestation (Greek 'epiphaneia') of the 'Word made flesh'. We know that Christ has been born among us, but do we take time to glimpse what this really means? A world forever changed, God with us, enfleshed in our humanity and abiding in our hearts: '*God become man that we might become God.*' (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*) And if God has become human, that means that all matter is in some sense sacred. Such a spiritual perception, nurtured by patient wonder, affects everything we are and how we live our daily lives. The wise men needed the star to guide them, in order to discover something so beyond their ordinary culturally-conditioned prejudices. Perhaps we need to journey too?

I wonder, was there a special moment for you during the Christmas season? Perhaps seeing a child captivated by a Nativity play, the look on someone's face whom you spent time with or feeling thankful when engaged in community service. Such rare glimpses are a reminder of God's way with the world, and open our eyes to the wonder of simply being present to receive. As we dare to wonder and to journey this year, may we be met by the God who promises to surprise us with joy and fresh hope.

I found these words helpful: 'A new beginning! We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life. Imagine that we could live each day as a day full of promises. Imagine that we could walk through the New Year always listening to a voice saying to us, "I have a gift for you and can't wait for you to see it!"

Revd James Shakespeare

Epiphany 1: the Baptism of Christ



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Baptism of Christ – Piero Della Francesca

Baptisms are wonderful and something to be celebrated. For some your parents arranged for your baptism when you were an infant, for others it comes later in life but either way it is a gift and a blessing. I wondered when thinking about this whether we truly understand why we are baptised and why it's so special. Let's have a look ...

Jesus comes to His cousin John the Baptist to be baptised. Baptism is a

washing away of sin and Jesus shows us how to do this by entering the water himself, He humbles Himself, He is not embarrassed or ashamed that people might think He is a sinner, we know He wasn't. He accepts being seen in the company of sinners. Jesus enters the water knowing that anyone who does not know Him will count Him among the sinners. As Christians we believe Jesus was baptised so that he could become like one of us. This shows his great humility. He set an example for us to follow. Jesus' baptism was also an opportunity to show his authority as God confirmed he was his Son.

'And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

In accepting baptism, Jesus does not enter the water alone. He takes us with Him, for we are members of His Body. As the Head of the Body, He goes where the members will follow.

By going into the water Jesus receives four gifts on our behalf:

Access – *The heavens are opened.*

The heavens and paradise were closed to us after Original Sin, but at Jesus' Baptism, they are opened.

Jesus acquires this gift for us. At our

Baptism, the heavens open for us and we have access to the Father and to the heavenly places.

“For through Jesus we have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” Ephesians 2:17.

Anointing – *The Spirit of God descends on him like a dove.* Here, too, Jesus acquires the gift of the Holy Spirit for us. At our Baptism we are not just washed of sins, but we also become temples of the Holy Spirit. After our Baptism we are anointed with chrism, signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit. For adults, this happens at Confirmation, but even for infants there is an anointing at Baptism to recognise that the Spirit of God dwells in the baptised as in a temple. *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16*

Acknowledgment – *You are my beloved Son.* Jesus receives this acknowledgment from His Father for the faith of those who heard it and to acquire this gift for us. In our own Baptism we become the children of God. Because we become members of Christ’s Body, we now have the status of children of God. On the day of your Baptism, God acknowledges

you as His own dear child. *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” Galatians 3:26.*

Approval – *With you I am well pleased.* Jesus had always pleased His Father, but now He acquires this gift for us as well. Our own Baptism gives us sanctifying grace, the grace to be holy and pleasing to God. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in his sight” Ephesians 1:1-3.*

So, Christ was baptised for our sake, not His own, He already had these gifts but through His Baptism Jesus acquires these gifts for us so that we can receive them at our own Baptism. What a gift your Baptism is! The date of your baptism is a day to celebrate, enjoy it. Jesus fulfilled God’s righteousness by going into the water to get them for *you*. So, celebrate and shout “Hallelujah!” for you have been given the greatest of gifts, Baptism.

Sian Binley

Epiphany 2: The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9: 49-50)

Christian unity (or ecumenism, as it is called in some circles) is something that involves an act and affirmation of friendship – friendship between churches, church organizations/ denominations, and people belonging to various churches based on our faith in God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and who continues to sustain us through Holy Spirit.

In this passage, John has a concern: the disciples have seen someone who was casting out demons, this unnamed man was doing this in Jesus' name, the disciples tried to stop him, and this man was not following Jesus. Jesus' response to this is clear and straightforward. 'Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.' This has implications for Christian unity.

The disciples had a particular idea of who is for them (or with them) and who is against them. And, they wanted to start with the conventional notion that whoever is not for them – meaning whoever is

not with them – is against them. But, Jesus just challenges this assumption and asks his disciples to start with the understanding of who is not against them. This roughly means, 'do not look for understanding who is your friend, but start with the question of who is not your enemy'. Looking for who is our friend is easy, but looking for who is not our enemy is difficult. The continuing ecumenical journey of our church needs this principle: we may already have our friends in the relationship, but what we need to do is looking for 'those who are not against us' in God's ministry so that we can continue and widen our ecumenical union and family for serving God.

As we see, it is the disciples of Jesus who find themselves against the unnamed exorcist, as they exclude him from the discipleship or ministry of Jesus. He is not like one of us: this just shows that the disciples are against someone. Jesus is not convinced with this. This brings a challenge in our ongoing ecumenical journeys to self-reflect how we are

making efforts to become good friends to others and other churches in the discipleship of God.

*Our God,
Help us to cease to judge who is inside, and who is outside,
Who is sorted, and who is still figuring it out,
For it is Christ alone who knows who his true body is
And Christ alone who can lead her.
Amen.*

Muthuraj Swamy

Epiphany 3



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The Marriage at Cana by Giotto di Bondone, 14th century

Today on the third and penultimate Sunday of Epiphany, the Church recalls the story of Jesus changing water into wine. (John 2:1-11). This miracle is known also as the first of seven signs* recorded by St John in his Gospel.

“On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

Jesus at first questions his mother why she is involving him in this problem but like many mothers she ignores her son's concern by telling the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them! Jesus responds by telling the servants to fill six enormous stone jars that stood nearby. These would normally have been used for purification rites. Jesus then tells the servants to draw the water and to bring it to the master of ceremonies. The Master of Ceremonies tastes it and is amazed at its quality.....he is unaware of course of the transformation that has taken place. The Greek word used by John to describe this miracle is 'Semeion', meaning sign. Although for the Bride and Groom it was a gift, for the disciples it was a miracle. It enabled them to realise that this Jesus to whom they had only recently been called, was indeed Divine. Verse 11 has *"What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs* through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."*

At the end of John's Gospel (20:30) he writes *"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*

Another reading set for today comes from the Book of Revelation to John (19:6-10) It is a call to rejoicing

because the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Often the book of Revelation is not an easy one to understand, but this passage is perhaps one that is clearer than many. The imagery is of a wedding to express the intimate relationship between God and his people and it has its roots in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Isaiah addressing the Children of Israel has in 54 V. 5 *"For your Maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name, the Holy one of Israel is your Redeemer."*

Jane Williams in her Reflections on the reading from Revelation wrote "We are created to praise God. We cannot truly find our existence in any other way, and neither can the created world, which longs to re-echo to the sound of human voices raised in songs of praise to their creator." Verses 9 and 10 have *"Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."* And so our passage from Revelation provides an amazing and breathtaking picture of the great multitude rejoicing and praising their creator. This is an

experience beyond our present reach, but perhaps can remind us of occasions on our Spiritual journey when we have been part of a large congregation in church amidst a glorious wave of praise in worship.

I once had such an experience during worship at Holy Trinity, Brompton some thirty years ago. The gathering was for people who wanted to be part of the leadership of the Alpha course, then quite new. The church was full, perhaps four hundred people...and we were singing words of praise. The hymn came to its conclusion but the Holy Spirit clearly wanted us to continue. The congregation started singing in tongues which rose and dipped like waves lapping onto the shore. The organist crept in following the top line from the hymn. I was close to the organ and the sound was hypnotic. Without direction, the thoughts of the congregation gently quitenend and stopped. There was then a silence before a great Hallelujah. That was an experience that I shall never forget. For me it was a reminder that we are indeed created to praise God.

And so what do the readings today tell us? Our Gospel reading reminds us of the importance of a marriage celebration. Sadly as I write this in our second Lockdown, it is something that we are unable to do and perhaps highlights its importance. A marriage

celebration is a time for rejoicing in the loving partnership of two people who have committed themselves to each other. Our Lord uses such an occasion to perform his first miracle and a revelation of his divinity and to endorse marriage as a sacrament.

Our second reading gives us an image of the great multitude bowing down and worshipping their Creator. They have a privileged position and have been washed of their sins by the blood of Jesus. The wedding of the Lamb of God is with God's children, each one of us, the church which is made up of everyone who is on a journey to salvation...to be cleansed of our sin to become sinless, as Jesus is. 2 Peter 1:3-4 has "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world."

We are all at a different stage on our Christian journey, but in believing and trusting in our Saviour we have received that promise, and everyone who walks this way, in the light of Christ, is a member of the body of Christ. Together we are preparing ourselves to be the bride of Christ. We are making ourselves ready.

Heavenly Father we thank you for your love and your blessings. We thank you for the scriptures and for your guidance through the Holy Spirit to understand your will for each one of us. We thank you for your promise of Salvation and for your invitation to be with you even to the end of time and at that great celebration. Amen

*The seven signs are: The changing water into wine at Cana in John 2:1-11, The healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54, The healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-15; The feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14, Jesus walking on water in John 6:16-24; The healing the man blind from birth in John 9:1-7 and the raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45

Rev John Hillier

Epiphany 4 Presentation of Christ in the Temple – Candlemas



Presentation of Christ in the Temple,
from the Sherbrooke Missal

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” - Luke 2:29-32 (NRSV)

Today the Church celebrates Candlemas – also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus, and the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As the name suggests, Candlemas is a time when many Christians bring their candles to Church to be blessed, which are then used throughout the year – remembering how Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. Crêpes have been a traditional food of Candlemas, since the 5th Century when Pope Gelasius I gave them to pilgrims arriving in Rome – do you prefer savoury or sweet crêpes?

It has been more than five weeks since we celebrated the Nativity of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day, and by now most of the festive decorations we once saw all around us have disappeared. But Christmas is not confined to only one day; one could say Jesus's birthday lasts a little longer than most birthdays!

As we see in the famous traditional Christmas carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, many Christians celebrate Christmas for twelve days – from Christmas Day to Epiphany. But many other Christians continue celebrating Christmas until Candlemas – the Feast we keep today. How long do you celebrate Christmas for; are your Christmas decorations still up?

Let us think about the words of Mary and Simeon in today's Bible passage from Luke 2. Simeon's words of devotion to Christ form one of the prayers many of us are familiar with today – the Nunc Dimittis – immediately recognising Jesus as Lord and the Messiah. His words to the Blessed Virgin Mary allude to the anguish she would experience at the death Christ would suffer before His resurrection – quite startling, given how only a few months beforehand (and in the previous chapter of St. Luke's Gospel) Mary had joyfully sung the words of the Magnificat, rejoicing in how God had chosen her to bear the Christ Child.

Very little is known about the infancy of Christ – but the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel is one of our best windows through which meet the young Messiah. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we see the Son filled with the Father's favour and Wisdom, growing and becoming stronger, as He prepares for the public ministry He goes on to perform.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your blessed Incarnation. We pray that we may continually follow your direction in our lives – both when the path is visible and when it is not – and that we may shine as your lights in the world, for you are the Light of the World. Amen.

Will Lyon Tupman

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