

## EPIPHANY '05

First of all, I wish you all a very Happy New Year! I wanted if possible to gather as many different congregations in one go today by having just one 'united' service, so please join us afterwards for either a glass of wine or, something hotter.

I am sure all of us have read the usual advice for a January 'reset' after all the excesses of the festive season. According to a survey in the 'I' Newspaper, 38% of people had a 'sudden urge to tidy the house' (I've not managed that yet) and 20% are 'feeling eager to hit the gym' (no chance!). But for all of us who are cynical about promising ourselves certain resolutions we know we will break, today's Epiphany Feast reminds us something very important – to keep on our shared Christian pilgrimage with all its ups and downs, its challenges and joys.

And within our faith communities there surely is space in our hearts and minds to say and know that with change, comes growth. For myself, I reflect in church life (perhaps too much) how we often over-burden a small group of people to do something or plan to achieve something, when sharing the load more, and sharing our gifts more, would be the best new year gift we could give to ourselves...and our Epiphany 'moment' is to ask ourselves just that: how can I serve God in 2025 in new ways? How can I reveal and make known to those with whom I live and work, that our local Church has the power to attract and encourage that sense of wonder and welcome which those first Magi experienced? Didn't they

discover the real star of Christmas, the same Christ-child we seek, and heaven come down to earth? Yes, there has to be mystery in our partial understanding but the searching never stops: to discover and share more of the riches of God's love for us and all creation. I remember those famous lines from T.S.Eliot's inspired poem, 'Little Gidding':

"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."

So often in our minds, or perhaps just our experience of too many nativity plays, we see the long travail of the Magi as the last scene of the play, when we can all now relax or collapse, take down the stage set & decorations until another year. But the poet or scientist, or explorer and yes, you and I, know differently; that our Christian journeying also needs resetting or re-imagining so as to make a Christian 'difference' to our sense of shared, sacramental prayer and service and outreach.

Together, we should celebrate more taking the light of Christ to the market place, to the Riverside Theatre, to the Food Bank, to our schools and care homes, to our colleagues or neighbours - and rejoice more in what unites us in our hoping and believing. It really is a binding resolution that change and growth, growth and change are integral to our Christian 'life together', our everyday life 'in Christ'. And I have no doubts at the beginning of any new year that our faithful churchgoing, our prayers, and our love for each other, are a sure sign of

how our belief shapes our hopes for a more generous, peaceful and just world.

We are very lucky to have our own Epiphany Chapel here where, I couldn't help noticing, our wonderful Victorian Corbould picture has a female wise person carrying the myrrh – well, why not? The prophet Isaiah doesn't concentrate on such details but that, instead, every character represents the universality of the Christ-child: "Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you."

The star of Christmas is the star of Epiphany also when all shall see, and do see, the glory of the Lord around us in every corner of the world. Even the animals seem to know that God is made manifest, a very real presence to both lead and inspire us in the year ahead. It is a year, too, when we must be much more sensitive and generous in our collective thinking about migration and immigration. In recent days I have been horrified by some paper headlines for their jingoism. We must resist this as Christians, who believe in the gift, more than the cost, of internationalism.

In Spain, you know, people have waited until today to open their presents, so meaningful is the start of this new Epiphany season. May we too be blessed, day by day, by the God who comes to us in Word and Sacrament, always surprising us and encouraging us to make intentional promises, and to respond with a lively faith.

So with courage and in hope, let us continue on the journey together, and lift up our eyes and hearts to find and know Him who made us, loves us, and will save us. Amen.