

EPIPHANY 2

Look no further than today's prophetic voice in Isaiah to understand what our shared Epiphany means! The Lord called us before we were born to honour his faithfulness and discover his all-encompassing and redeeming love.

That's some start, to any New Year, to get our heads and hearts around! In today's gathering prayer or Collect, we actually pray that "in the **renewal** of our lives" God will make known his heavenly glory in the choices ahead of us and the kind of Christian service we feel called to explore afresh, and follow, in 2023.

'Now hang on', I hear you cry, 'I am quite happy carrying on as I am' – 'I feel all this talk of renewal quite unsettling.'

Someone said to me recently that they like 'all their ducks in a row' when it comes to their regular routines. I fully understand that inner call for order, for process, if only for the sake sometimes of self-preservation. But alongside such a wish is, so often, our wrestling with the Scriptures which contradict and challenge that world view. Isaiah was not known for our making shortcuts or compromises at all. His God and, arguably ours too, is a God of surprises! God already knows our weaknesses and foibles; and God also knows how easily we can make our excuses if the going gets tough or when, so easily, we resist God's call to live out those promises made on our behalf at our Baptism.

We may not remember that mad moment of shock when the priest poured cold water all over you or when some oil was

marked over you and the priest got carried away with such strong symbolic enthusiasm that even he or she got wet and oily as well! If, then, we now turn to our Gospel of the day, we learn that John the Baptist cannot but testify when he sees Jesus coming towards him...the words just seem to flow without his having time to stop to think or even breathe, so caught up is he with this sense of energy and purpose to literally point out Jesus.

‘Look, **here** is the Lamb of God’... ‘Look he is **there** also’ and, just like the Panto when we all love to shout out: ‘Look, he’s **behind** you.’ I am reminded of that wonderful hymn ascribed to St Patrick:

“Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to guide me, Christ to comfort and restore me.”

That’s just the first verse, but we are left in no doubt that the presence of Christ in the life of John the Baptist and yes, the presence of Christ in our lives in 2023, is always going to be something potentially transformative. However shocking or surprising, when we make our own ‘YES’ silently or loudly, to His call, we are changed for ever. What we thought might be a risky response or decision to that call, can still prove to be an altogether liberating one. God called us by our Names even before we were able to accept, recognize or interpret that first calling at our Baptism.

So let’s take stock at the beginning of a new year and be thankful that we are each called to be God’s children in this

particular place and Parish community. Let's take stock and rejoice in our many shared (and sometimes unshared) different gifts. But as with all good children, let's be open to learning new things and doing new things under God's colourful rainbow.

I hope you will have already seen and read that next Sunday we are inviting you to stay and linger after our services to look at our most pressing needs for growth and outreach; might you take the plunge, even if swimming isn't your thing, and help us do new things and, in teams?

I ask this as one who so often fails to be a good team person. But I also know that team building is at the very core of my vocation as a priest. As I tried to say last week, we cannot and must not 'privatize' our faith or lock our gifts away. We must open our treasures of faith and reveal them, use them, enjoy them, in order that we can grow our fellowship and outreach and service to others.

If I may re-iterate our prayer after Communion, we are all in the same boat when we say to our Epiphany God, the God of all glory: "fill us with your Holy Spirit that through us the light of your glory may shine in all the world."

Amen and Amen!