

## Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (EPIPHANY) From Fr. Mike

- [Isaiah 60.1-6](#)
- [Psalm 72. \[1-9\] 10-15](#)
- [Ephesians 3.1-12](#)
- [Matthew 2.1-12](#)

### Collect for Epiphany

**O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Do you realise (notwithstanding possible future lockdowns) as you read this there are now only **354** shopping days until Christmas 2021?! The pine needles should now be (mostly) out of the carpet, the tree in the recycling bin, cards down, the Nativity scenes in all churches and homes reflecting cleanly swept stables (sanitising - even *romanticising* poverty?) reflecting a country-style birth straight from the pages of a reassuring Laura Ashley catalogue, are finally packed away...UGH!

Truth be told – Jesus was surrounded by filth and animals, with only the company of a few rough shepherds. Does this mean he was poor – a working class lad from Bethlehem made good?

### **Background**

Jesus was born into a comfortable world. Consider the evidence:

1. Mary and Joseph had the money to flee to Egypt and live abroad for a few years to escape Herod's wrath. Generally, the poor do not have these resources at their disposal.
2. Jesus was well-educated. He had the financial resources to learn reading, writing, and he trained as a rabbi.

3. The family business (i.e. carpentry) was skilled. As wood was fundamental to the structure of most housing, Joseph was more than a rude artisan. (The Greek word 'Tekton' comes from 'Architekton' and really means 'civil engineer.')
4. Even at his death, Jesus owned a seamless (expensive) robe and his body was smuggled away by a foreign merchant to be given a decent burial.

Remember too that Jesus was born in a stable only because the hotels were fully booked. Mary and Joseph could have afforded a room (so they were clearly not *that* poor) and they even had their own transport. Furthermore, when the Wise Men came to visit, they brought *expensive* gifts (Gold; Frankincense and Myrrh have never been cheap). As our Collect for today shows, the word 'Epiphany' simply means '**manifest**' and the Wise Men's gifts are traditionally seen as the culmination of the early manifestation of Jesus' divinity.

### **What are the implications of all this for us?**

Apparently, Jesus turned his back on his class roots and chose poverty. He believed rich men would struggle to gain entry into heaven and assumed the poor would be there by right. Jesus made friends among the poor, prostitutes, sinners, lepers, the mentally ill, widows, and indeed all manner of 'outcasts.' He was radical. Jesus routinely challenged the wealthy, the proud, and often targeted the complacent. He was demanding. Jesus required his followers to - sell all they have; take no gold or silver for the journey; and always bless the beggar, the homeless and the hungry whenever possible. This is truly radical, anti-bourgeois stuff!

As City Centre Chaplain I was recently part of a zoom meeting attended by twenty-five agencies to address local child poverty. This in itself is an extraordinary, even shameful statement, given that we apparently enjoy the status of the 'sixth most wealthiest country in the world' yet there are still hungry children and horrendous levels of poverty in our 'green and pleasant' kingdom! How can this even be a fact? Sadly, it is...

Equally disturbing, is that our government 'do not keep a record' although the statistic that exists is that in 2020 there were over 2,000 'Foodbanks' in the U.K. - 1,200 run by the Trussell Trust and 822 by IFAN (Independent Food Aid Network). Just to put this into perspective – there are also 1,300 McDonalds fast-food outlets trading in the U.K.

So, the outrageous number of our foodbanks alone exceeds our McDonalds restaurants!

Understanding that we are one of the most privileged societies in the world (no matter where we sit on the party political spectrum) if we are serious about manifesting our faith, and wish to emulate the Magi to 'search diligently' and make a real difference, then our collective priorities must require urgent recalibration. Even if it means we literally pay more tax! Our spiritual manifesto for this required behaviour is presented by St. Paul this morning who reminds us that we must confidently preach and ultimately live 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' even though we are 'less than the least of all saints' (*Ephesians 3.v8*).

Again, we draw further inspiration for this benevolent approach from the Psalmist who points out: 'For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth: the poor also, and him that hath no helper.' (*Psalms 72. v12*). We are Christ's very hands and feet that carry out ('bless') this need on earth. At Epiphany, we are called to emulate the wise men who came bearing gifts for a king. Their journey was costly, and they came at the worst season of the year. And yet...

There was no immediate comfort at the end of that long journey. They tried Herod's palace first – but found they had the wrong address. What they found instead was something similar to our society – an ordinary family in temporary accommodation, struggling with a new baby. It must have been quite a shock! Nevertheless, the Gospels record that despite the unusual circumstances before them, the wise men still gave their gifts (expensive as they were) and left them at that lowly feeding trough in a filthy stable. In their own way, they too were quite radical in their actions. Consequently, the wise men speak once again through history by throwing a key and urgent question and challenge back to us:

**'What gifts will WE actually give to the homeless; the marginalised; the hungry; the displaced refugee; and ultimately to the poor in 2021?'** Our response to this crucial question, and therefore to the very Epiphany of Jesus, remains disarmingly simple: it must surely **cost not less than everything!**

Meanwhile, take encouragement from the prophet who says: **'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'** (Isaiah 60.1)

Amen! Fr. Mike (Epiphany 2021)

