

# THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

## YEAR B

**1<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 2012 [from 6th January]**

1. Today the season of Christmas ends with the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord, a time to celebrate the light of Christ shining in the darkness of this world. It is traditionally associated with the legend of the magi, astrologers or sorcerers who came to pay the Christ-child homage and perhaps to lay before him in obeisance the instruments of their dark craft. The story of the magi appears only in Matthew and for the Jewish Christians of Matthew's community it contained signs from their Scriptures that Jesus, indeed, was the Messiah.
2. This story carefully combines elements important to Jewish people: that Jesus came from the line of David; that he was born in Bethlehem near the end of the reign of Herod the Great who feared losing his throne; that the East was a source of wisdom; that the star was a symbol of the Messiah. By a series of signs the child was manifested as the epiphany or revelation of God in the world. The gold and frankincense of Isaiah 60. 1-6 and Psalm 72 may have influenced the writer of the gospel, and the camels may have influenced our popular understanding of the magi's mode of travel! (Notice camels are not in the narrative.)
3. Christ's life was a series of epiphanies: in Birth, Baptism, Transfiguration, in bringing sight to the blind and healing to the lame, in calming the storm, and of course in death, resurrection and ascension, and at Pentecost. So today the importance of our celebration is theological rather than historical.
4. Like Paul in Ephesians 3.1-12 we rejoice in the mystery of the revelation of God in the world and the inclusion of all people in God's salvation. It's relevant today in a world where God sometimes seem hidden by the darkness of mankind's lack of humanity. Look for signs of the revelation of God in the darkest of situations; in the light and hope given in times of fear and despair; in compassion and mercy and forgiveness and practical aid; in times of insight and awareness of the presence of God with us. Perhaps you have had an epiphany yourself— a time when God has been revealed to you in a special way, a time when darkness covered you until Christ brought light and hope into the situation. Look for these times of revelation to you in your suffering and your darkness. May you know the light of Christ in your life. May that same light

of Christ 'signal the dawn of justice and peace, and beckon all nations to walk as one ...' (The Prayer of the Day)

# THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

## YEAR B

**8th January 2012**

### **(First Sunday after Epiphany)**

**Have you seen those Wallis and Grommit cartoons** where plasticene figures become animated to the point that they become real? Without the art of the cartoonist we would have only lifeless still pictures. “Animated” comes from the same Latin root as “animal” - *animo—to give life to*. Today is the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord and the first Sunday after Epiphany and we focus on the life-giving Spirit of God, not the appearance of life as in cartoons, but genuine, authentic, purposeful life.

**In Genesis 1.1-5 we hear the familiar words** of the beginning of the creation story, just five verses to focus on the animating power of God. “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep”. The earth came to life and light came into the darkness with the “wind of God” and the word of God. Psalm 29 celebrates the animating power of God in song.

**In the Jordan River, the Spirit of God descends on Jesus** and God’s voice affirms his identity and mission as the Son of God, filled with the Spirit’s power (Mark 1. 4-11).

**The account of Paul in Ephesus** (Acts 19.1-7) is a dramatic illustration of the power of the Spirit to animate those early Christians and to make their attitude of repentance and belief a reality. Baptised in water and the Spirit their faith was enlivened with gifts for ministry.

**5. We can think we can do whatever we want** if our will power is strong enough, but it is only when we submit to God and open our hearts to receive his Spirit that his will can be done. Alcoholics know this—it is only when they submit and acknowledge that only a Higher Power can help them, that they can begin the road to recovery. In our baptism, we are baptised with water and the Spirit, we hear God’s promises and know our identity and our calling. In opening our lives to God’s animating Spirit we can do far more than we can imagine by ourselves. This Spirit-given life is not the animation of the cartoonist’s puppets. It is the coming to us of the Spirit of life, abiding with us, living in us, giving us true life and authentic existence

# *Second Sunday after Epiphany*

## *Year B*

**15th January 2012**

**What it means to be human is a great mystery.** It has been the subject of literature, and film. I can think of Shakespearean tragedies, the poetry of John Donne and Yeats, and the film *Bladerunner* where this subject is explored. It is frightening, awe-inspiring, yet amazingly special that God should know us each so intimately as the Psalmist speaks in Psalm 139. God knows each of us more intimately than our spouses do, or than parents know their children. We repeat these ideas in the Service of Holy Communion when we say the Prayer of Preparation (APBA p.119) He knows us inside out.

**How much more is God a mystery to us!** There seems to be a universal search to know God yet no one and no group of people can claim to know God fully. He is and always will be a mystery even though our lifetime can be spent on getting to know God more deeply.

**The season of Epiphany is concerned with the revealing of the mystery of God in the person of Jesus.** Philip was ready to hear Christ's call to follow him, Nathanael, one 'without guile' was prepared to enter into the relationship of a disciple of Christ. John 1.43-51) They entered into a growing relationship, a journey of discovery about Jesus who would reveal the Father to them. The knowledge of God would be sealed forever except for the one worthy to break the seal and reveal the secrets of God (Revelation 5. 1-10)

4. **It is in knowing God through Jesus that we discover what it is to be truly human** for in doing so we will discover that our purpose is to love God and worship him forever and to love our neighbours as ourselves May we pray with Richard of Chichester:

O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,  
may I know Thee more clearly,  
love Thee more dearly,  
follow Thee more nearly,  
day by day. Amen."

# *Third Sunday after Epiphany*

## *Year B*

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2012**

**Those who were advocates for Van Nguyen** who was executed in December 2005 cited his repentance and change of attitude as a reason for mercy; however the Singaporean government was adamant that the mandatory death sentence should remain. What a contrast that story is to that of the Ninevites (Jonah 3. 1-10) who were regarded as the supreme example of Gentile irreligion and infamy by their Jewish neighbours. Jonah's message of doom had an immediate effect on the Ninevites. They believed God, they repented, they turned from their evil and violent ways. And God showed mercy on them.

**God's mercy is the good news** which Jesus came preaching in Galilee (Mark 1. 14-20). The time has come for repentance, the time has come for the Kingdom of God. The good news comes in the person of Jesus through whom the forgiveness of sins will be achieved. The response of the four fishermen is immediate, just as the Ninevites' was.

**We pray that we will "hear the call to discipleship,** forsake our old ways, and proclaim the gospel of new life to a broken world" (Collect) Repentance and mercy need to be lived out again and again in our lives as individuals and in our communities. We live in a community which does not like to recognize sin—perhaps we no longer believe in mercy either. Yet this is a broken world which we see in our own imperfect lives, in unhappiness, jealousy, weariness and purposelessness, in discrepancies between rich and poor, and in the continuing warring of tribes and nations.

- 4. Today's message of epiphany is a call to a second chance,** a new life, putting behind us all that is sinful, to believe that God is merciful and to look forward to a time when the kingdom of God is fulfilled. The first step to that new life is the response to Jesus' call to follow him.

# *Fourth Sunday after Epiphany*

## *Year B*

**29<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

**Every new teacher is given authority** in the classroom to teach and discipline .Children learn very quickly that they must accept and take up that authority or their classes will be uncontrollable and unteachable. You can give teachers authority but they still will be unauthoritative unless they develop their own moral authority to which children respond. You might think of others who speak and act with authority: doctors, experts in any field, policemen and judges . We all know they are given authority by someone higher, but they need to speak and act with authority for acceptance, and in turn we must also give them authority over us.

**Today we focus on Jesus' authority.** Last week we saw Jesus' calling the disciples. His call was authoritative and authentic and so they responded. And today (Mark 1.21-28) he enters the synagogue and taught 'as one having authority'. Somehow this man's teaching had something extra which the teaching of the scribes lacked. "Just then" Mark says, a possessed man entered the synagogue and the evil spirit within him recognized Jesus for who he was. "I know who you are, he says. Now to others, this evil spirit would have been a fearful thing. Not so for the Holy One. He rebuked the spirit and cast him out. The people first astounded by Jesus' teaching were now amazed at his power and recognized his authority, an authority which could only have come from God. No doubt in their minds would be the teaching in the Torah which we heard in Deuteronomy 18.15-20. here was a new prophet who spoke with the authority of God and whose actions proved it

**How do we see the authority of Jesus?** Do we see Jesus as being given authority by his Father? Do we hear him speaking authoritatively in our lives? Do we see his authoritative actions in the world? Do we give him authority over us? We pray 'Lord Jesus Christ', perhaps even without thinking. But we need to ask ourselves what that concept of Lordship means today. In ancient and medieval time, the authority of one's lord was paramount, the subjects of the lord responding with loyalty and obedience. In our world, authorities are suspect. However, we still respond to those whose moral authority is such that we listen, and follow their example and advice. In a world where rejection of authority leaves many dependent on their own devices, we pray that we might accept willingly Christ's authority in our lives, and that our example might witness to others that Christ is our light.