



St Paul's Church



Dear all

By this weekend, most of us will have taken down our Christmas decorations, disposed of our trees and packed away our fairy lights. Epiphany (6th January), which we'll be celebrating at Café Church this Sunday, marks the end of the Christmas season, although opinion varies as to whether the crib should be taken down at this point or left until Candlemas (2nd February). What do *you* think?

Traditionally of course, Epiphany commemorates the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, we read about a star appearing, the magi recognising it for what it was and travelling to Bethlehem to worship the new king. Matthew portrays these men as righteous people who appear to be astrologers from somewhere east of Jerusalem, possibly Persia or Arabia, but he does not make their origins clear. Maybe this was because, like other Jews of his day, Matthew was inclined to split the world into God's people and 'the rest', the Jews and the Gentiles, and wherever 'the rest' were from was not especially important.

But notice though, that in Matthew's most Jewish of Gospels, the *first* people who recognised who Jesus was and came to worship him were not God's own people but outsiders, people not just from another land but likely another faith. There's something deeply symbolic about that isn't there, the idea that regardless of background or status, all are invited to share in Christ, the divine light that illuminates the world? The story of the magi demonstrates that God's presence, thank goodness, is not limited to a select few. We could say that these travellers from the East represent the diversity of humanity, crossing cultural and geographical boundaries to seek the divine. The magi were on a journey of discovery, and this tells us that the light of Christ shines upon every path welcoming seekers, sceptics and believers alike.

The magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Can we offer the gifts of acceptance, understanding and love to all who cross our paths? Can we show our own communities that God's love is ever-expanding and ever-embracing of all people in all places? Can we be the voice of inclusivity, of welcome and compassion, especially for those who literally or metaphorically, come among us as visitors from a strange land?

Rev Anthea

FORTHCOMING SERVICES

All services are in church, zoom is available for some services.

SUNDAY 7th JANUARY – Epiphany

10 am Café Worship – Gwyn

SUNDAY 14th JANUARY – Epiphany 2

10 am All-Age Worship – Rev Anthea

SUNDAY 21st JANUARY – Epiphany 3

10 am All-Age Worship – Rev Anthea

SUNDAY 28th JANUARY – Epiphany 4

10 am All-Age Worship – Rev Anthea

EVENTS

THURSDAY 18th JANUARY @ 2.30 pm

Fellowship: Bring & Buy Auction

FRIDAY 26th JANUARY @ 7 pm

Church Crafts

SATURDAY 27th JANUARY @ 6 pm for 6.30 pm

1960s-1980s Disco (*bring your own drinks*)

FRIDAY 2nd FEBRUARY @ 9.30 am

Baby & Toddler Group

THURSDAY 15th FEBRUARY @ 2.30 pm

Fellowship: Beetle Drive

FRIDAY 23rd FEBRUARY @ 7 pm

Church Crafts

FOOD BANK

The next food bank delivery is Friday 12 January.

PRAYER RESOURCE

week beginning Sunday, 7th January 2024

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart; ...seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.'
(Proverbs 3)

We thank God:

- At the beginning of this new year, we place our trust in a faithful God and thank him for being that baby who changed us.
- For the Christmas tree and beautiful flower displays in church during this special time; pray for all who give up their time throughout the year to make sure our church has fresh flower displays.

Please pray for:

- Peace, hope and joy in our world and in our lives this year.
- People living in war-torn areas: in Gaza as the intense fighting continues, and in Ukraine as the Russian attacks intensify.
- All caught up in the Japan earthquake.
- The healing of bad memories; may we place our trust in a faithful Lord, thanking him for being that baby who changed us.
- All whose lives have been disrupted already this year by ill-health, bereavement, family breakdowns or accidents.
- The safety of all as the UK continues to be battered by winter storms.
- Our Church family: all who are struggling, and for Edith, Pat, Alice, Jill, Trevor, Maureen, Sandra and Brenda; and for Ruth, Helen and Meaghan.
- Let us look forward with hope and trust to all that lies ahead.

You may like to use this prayer during the week:

Cleanse my heart, O God, and renew my spirit. Teach me to do what pleases you and lead me sensitively into this new year and always. Amen.