



The Benefice of St Mary's Bocking & Panfield Church



Sunday 8th January 2023
The Feast of The Epiphany
Staying in Contact

The Very Revd Rod Reid - Incumbent (*usual rest day Monday*)

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or on Facebook, search for 'St Mary's Church, Bocking', or 'Panfield Church'

Forthcoming Services

Hymns

St Mary's, Bocking

Sunday 8th January	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass
Wednesday 11th January	9.30am	Said Mass
Sunday 15th January	8am	Said Mass
	10am	Sung Mass

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Panfield Church

Sunday 8th January	11am	Holy Communion
Tuesday 10th January	5pm	Evening Prayer
Sunday 15th January	6pm	BCP Evensong

Gospel Acclamation

*We saw his star as it
rose, and have come
to pay homage.*

NOTICES

Friends AGM - A reminder that the Friends AGM will take place on Saturday 14th January at 4pm in the Church Hall, we look forward to seeing you then.

Lent Soup - On Sunday February 26th following the main morning service there will be a Lent Soup in the Church Hall. Please can we encourage you to save the date. A sign up sheet so that we can gauge numbers will follow in a few weeks time, thank you.

Quarterly Newsletter - The second issue of our Newsletter needs to go to the printers by Monday 20th February. If you have ideas for content, or areas of church life we could include, please speak to or email Fr Rod. We won't be able to include them all, but we can make sure to do so through the year.

Fellowship - The next meeting will be Thursday 19th Jan at 12.30pm in the Church Hall, cost is £5 for the lunch & talk. Our speaker this month is Amanda Sutherland, her talk entitled 'My Creative Journey'.

Junior Church - We are looking forward to building on the recent successes of Junior Church, new dates for 2023 will follow soon, as well as some Messy Church events as well.

A Warm Place this Winter - Every Friday until March 10th we will be opening St Mary's Church Hall from 11.30am to 2pm as a warm place. Along with being a friendly space, there will be refreshments and a simple soup lunch, all of which will be free. Why not bring a friend and come along yourself.

Going Green! - In partnership with A Rocha, an environmental charity, we are hoping to work towards the various awards associated with being an Eco-Church. There will be opportunities for all to get involved as we progress, including for our younger ones. Watch this space for more details.

Prayers - We keep in our prayers Jean Goodwin, Sue, Jackie, Roger Hurford, Frances, Margaret, Peter, Jenifer, Jo, June Blackwood, Gwen Nicholls and Margaret Everitt. We also remember our care homes Millard House, Fern Lodge, Aspen Grange, Larchwood, The New Deanery & St Mary's Court. In our Years Mind, we pray for the families of Arthur Finch, Annie Hedger, Catherine Wood, Louise Jarvis, Frances Williams, Eric Smyth, Kate Playle, George Cocks, Lilian Crouse, Louisa Biggs, Ron Suckling, Reginald Jarvis, Edward France, Cissie Bragg, Beryl Deacon, Ellen Dickerson, Madge Smith, Arthur Baines and Joe Vincent.

The Collect for the Feast of The Epiphany

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Epistle Reading - Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."' Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when

you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Address

‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?’ (Matthew Chapter 2 Verse 2). The wise men, having seen the star and interpreted its likely meaning, quite reasonably travel to Jerusalem and seek further information from King Herod. They know that there has been a birth of the greatest significance; they do not know where the baby, who is to be a king, is located. King Herod seeks information from the religious scholars and tells the visitors that the promised baby, who is to be ruler of Israel, is prophesied to be born in Bethlehem. The wise men knew that something momentous had happened but did not know where; the Jewish scholars knew where this event would take place but seem not to have read the signs in the heavens which indicated that a long-expected and hoped-for event had finally happened. Each party had imperfect information and needed the other. When they had, as it were, completed the puzzle, their responses were very different. The wise men went to Bethlehem and presented their gifts, paying homage to the new king. It was indeed the ‘manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles’ as the festival which we celebrate today is described. King Herod, by contrast, fearful and not understanding what sort of king the new-born baby was destined to be, decided to have him killed.

I don’t in this sermon want to dwell on the events surrounding the visit of the wise men. Only St Matthew has this particular story and its aftermath in the so-called massacre of the innocents and the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. There is no independent evidence of a massacre as described by St Matthew; and the flight into Egypt and subsequent return may have more theological than historical significance, with its echoes of captivity and then freedom restored. It is, however, perhaps worth noticing that it is St Matthew, perhaps the most Jewish of the four Gospel writers, who hints at the universal implications of the Incarnation. Jesus was, and is, for all people not just the people of Israel.

Instead I want to reflect briefly on my suggestion that the interaction of two parties (the wise men and the Jewish scholars) led to an insight about the implications of what had happened in the birth of Jesus that neither party might have come to without the involvement of the other. The wise men gained their insight into what God was doing through their study of the universe. They almost certainly thought that unexpected appearances in the night sky had something to say about what was happening in the affairs of human beings. We might think of this as a sort of general revelation. But it needed to be completed by the special revelation about God’s purposes which God had entrusted to his chosen people, the Jews. May it not just possibly have been the case that some of the religious experts of the time also learned something from the wise men: that God’s purposes were more universal than they had imagined?

That may be too speculative, but I want to suggest that our own Christian journeys may often be enriched by an encounter with people, situations or ideas which may, at first sight, seem to challenge rather than affirm. Let me offer three examples. ‘Why did God allow it to happen?’ is a question that most people engaged in any sort of pastoral ministry are almost certain to have been asked. It may be asked with regard to serious illness or some other life-changing event. It is not an unreasonable question, and there is rarely an entirely convincing answer. Offering support and prayer rather than attempting explanations is probably the right response at the moment when such a question is asked. There may come a time when it is possible to explore with the person affected the implications for their faith and their understanding of God as a God of love. But reflecting, ideally with others, on the sort of situations in which this question is asked and how best to respond is an important part of growing into a more mature pastoral ministry. We can both learn, and deepen our faith, as much because of the challenges we face as through the joyful times.

Secondly, although the idea of an inevitable conflict between science and religion is now much less prevalent than it was in some past times, there are still challenges from non-believing scientists. Richard Dawkins is possibly one of the best known examples. There is a lot about Dawkins that I admire. He writes well and is able to explain what evolutionary biology is about in terms which non-scientists can understand. But his hatred of religion seems to know no bounds. His arguments are not that difficult to counter and I have in the past heard some very powerful demolitions of Dawkins' views on religion. He was, however, (and perhaps still is) influential and the 'science has disproved religion' mindset has not gone away. If Dawkins and others challenge Christian teachers to be better able to explain why religion and science are not in conflict, but can each learn from the other then this is surely a positive outcome. Indeed it might be more worrying if religion was seen as so irrelevant to modern life that there was no need to challenge or attack it.

Thirdly, we are all aware that we live in a multi-faith world and indeed in a multi-faith society. I have a great deal of respect for faiths other than Christianity, even if my knowledge of them is quite limited. There are, however, very real differences. Co-operation between different faiths in terms of practical action is clearly desirable. I am much more sceptical about shared worship, given in particular the very different understandings of God in, for example, Christianity or some of the eastern religions. Genuine dialogue in which the hard questions are asked can help to sharpen each faith's understanding of its fundamental beliefs. There may also be scope for borrowing or adapting some practices which are particularly associated with one of the other faiths. From my limited experience of (westernised) Buddhism I suspect some churches could learn something about the use of silence and the value of meditation, though these also have a long history in Christianity. Equally other faiths can surely benefit from exposure to Christian belief and practice.

Some forty or more years ago Bishop John Robinson (of *Honest to God* fame) wrote a book entitled *Truth is Two-Eyed*. Put simply, his argument was that we all tend to look at things from within the prevailing mindset of our own culture, whether western or eastern. As such we are one-eyed. Moving outside that mindset and using both eyes is challenging and enriching. Amen.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God,
the bright splendour whom the nations seek:
may we who with the wise men have been drawn by your light
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.