

Glastonbury Together in prayer

A news sheet for members of Glastonbury churches during the crisis caused by Covid 19

The long road back

In the last issue we looked at life's journeys and related them to the trip Joseph and Mary took to Bethlehem. That was but a short journey compared to one that was to come when they travelled to Egypt to escape from Herod that is told in Matthews Gospel. Like Joseph and Mary we now have a long way to travel. It might seem that we can see the end of our Covid journey with the development of vaccines but their distribution will take time. Before we can be vaccinated we have to cope with a virus that is spreading fast in our area. The Government publish statistics for the number of cases split into areas of roughly equal population size. Here we had a late start and there were few cases in Somerset until September. In Mendip cases had peaks in October and November before falling back at the beginning of December. Since then, however, the levels have taken off again and as a result the area moved swiftly into higher levels of lockdown. Now in tier four Church services are still permitted but extra care is needed to maintain social distance and wear protective face coverings. The latest figures show the case rate in Glastonbury town rising through Christmas and the area defined as West Glastonbury and South Street has seen an increase greater than the national average. There has also been a case where a person attending Midnight Mass at St John's later tested positive for the virus. As a result services in the church have been suspended and have gone back online for a while. The Methodist Church has also decided that in person services should be suspended and details of online services are being distributed. We are travelling a hard road, but Jesus is with us always. He will help us make it through.

History of the Bible

Radio 4 have broadcast Hugh Bonneville reading from John Barton's story of the Bible and of how the two faiths that hold it sacred have shaped it and been shaped by it. It is still available to listen to as a pod cast and is worth the effort to listen to it. The author of the book is an Anglican Priest and biblical scholar who has written a number of books on scripture. The History of the Bible, subtitled The book and its Faiths, was published in 2019. It considers the book we know as the Bible from a historical point of view from both Christian and Jewish viewpoints. The book discusses the origins of the separate "books" within what we now know as the Bible and how they came together. In a secular society it points out that many maxims in the Bible remain part of our culture. It is also suggested that Jews and Christians see the Bible in different ways and understanding this will help interfaith relations.



Week of Prayer plans change

In recent times during the week of prayer for Christian unity we have travelled around the churches following the material provided by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. This year with Covid still around and with the tier 4 restrictions these meetings will not be possible but it is hoped that we can still meet together online to pray together for Christian Unity, using the zoom platform. Traditionally we have met at lunchtime and followed our prayer meeting with a light lunch but this year we have other options. It would be possible to hold the events at different times if this would help those who want to take part. Please let the person who sends you this newsletter know your preference for lunchtime (13:00) or early evening (19:00) meetings. If you read the newsletter from the web please contact the secretary of churches together in Glastonbury, Michael Cobb, who can be contacted on 01458 834809.



Epiphany of the Lord

A visit remembered

Very little is known about the early years of Jesus with a few different details given in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is only in Matthew that we hear of the visit of the Magi which is nevertheless well known with images on Christmas cards and figures for our crib sets. The Messiah was long awaited by the Jews and in Luke we hear that the message of His birth went first to the Jews through the Shepherds. The visit of the Magi in Matthew 2 is seen as the revelation of the Son of God to the Gentiles, non Jews. These visitors had seen a new star in the sky and their beliefs told them that this heralded the birth of a king. They set out to find him and do him homage by following that new star. The Gospel does not say how many wise men there were but tradition says there were three based on the number of different gifts that were given, Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. There is also no mention of who they were but tradition has given them names and titles. These details are not important to the account in the Gospel but add a human element that helps us to relate to the story. We do, however, read that they came from the east and again tradition shows them with different ethnicities in illustrations reflecting that Jesus came for all mankind. After the Magi left without going back via Herod we read that the angry King had male children under two killed whilst Mary and Joseph rescued Jesus by taking him into Egypt. This account is interpreted to mean that the visit was some time after the birth and that at the time the Holy Family were still living in Bethlehem. Traditions in relation to the Epiphany vary

around the world but in our land and in recent times the feast has been celebrated on 6th January, or the Sunday after in some churches, when this falls midweek. This Christmas season we had a lot of speculation about the star mentioned in the story, could it have been a conjunction of planets which happened in December 2020 and is known to have occurred at the time when Jesus was born?



As with Gladness

The first thought of a hymn for epiphany for many might be “We Three Kings” which lists the gifts but having discussed the story in the article alongside in this issue we look at another Epiphany hymn. “*As with Gladness Men of old*” as well as being a hymn for this time of year has another reason for consideration. The author was a local man having been born in Bristol, and later dying in Cheddar. Unusually in hymn writers of his time William Chatterton Dix was not a clergyman, he worked in the insurance industry in Scotland.

The hymn takes the story of the wise men and turns it to us. In the first verse as the star guided the Magi we ask “*most gracious Lord, may we - evermore be led to thee*”. In verse two the travellers speed with joyful steps whilst we ask “*so may we with willing feet - ever seek thy mercy seat*”. Verse three moves on to the gifts without naming them but asking “*so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin’s alloy, all our costliest treasures bring*”. In modern times this might seem a high cost until as Christians we remember the price Jesus paid for us. Whilst hinting at the Magi keeping on track the last verse is mainly aimed at us. We ask to be kept on the narrow way so that when our time on earth is done we will not need a star to guide us to see the glory of the Lord which clouds cannot hide.

A look at the lectionary - Baptism of the Lord

The appointed readings for the Sunday after Epiphany, 10th January in 2021, tell us about the Baptism of Jesus by John from the first chapter of Mark. John we are told was not worthy to untie the sandal straps of the one to come after him. Whilst John baptised with water he would be followed by one who would baptise with the spirit. Jesus is baptised and the spirit descends on him in the form of a dove - a symbol widely used for the Holy Spirit. A voice from Heaven announces that “this is my Son the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased”. The Gospel reading is the only thing in common between the Revised common and Catholic Lectionaries for this Sunday but do they relate to the theme in the Gospel reading? The revised common lectionary uses a reading from Acts 19 which talks about Paul’s visit to Ephesus. Paul finds out that the

disciples he meets have not heard about the Holy Spirit, they were baptised by John. This Paul tells them was a baptism of forgiveness. He then baptises them in the Name of Jesus and when he lays his hands on them they receive the Spirit and start speaking in tongues. The Catholic reading comes from the first Epistle of John. The reading starts by saying that those who believe in Jesus are children of God, we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. The text goes on to say that Jesus came not just with water but with water and blood. The Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is truth. Whilst they take a different angle and a different reading the two selections are strongly linked by the Holy Spirit, who was a witness at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river.