

THE OLD CHURCH NEWS

O P E N T O A L L - O P E N T O G O D

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 7 JANUARY 2013



GREETINGS FOR A NEW YEAR

On 1st January we celebrate the start of new year and I will continue to write '2012' on my cheques until around Easter time. That's how long it takes me to realise that we have moved on a year. Of course, the church year is already one month old by 1st January, with the period of Advent, the time of remembering Christ's birth and looking forward to His coming again, leading to the great festival of Christmas. And, I hope that you did indeed have an excellent Christmas. But, by January, the church year has moved on once more, past Christmas and towards the 6th January, the feast of the Epiphany.

Epiphany is the time for recalling the story told by Matthew, and only by him, of the visit of the Magi, sometime called Kings, or Kings from the East, or simply Wise Men, bringing gifts to Jesus. I remember asking as a somewhat insufferable child how was it that the Kings could travel from 'the East' – even from '*Persian lands afar*', take a detour to ask Herod the way, and still arrive on Christmas night at the stable to join the shepherds round the crib. I knew that was the case because every year my primary school played out the story, and there they were, Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, together with shepherds, kings, angels and the odd sheep and goat, depending on how many children were in the class that year. In fact, Matthew makes no mention of the shepherds, which come from Luke's gospel and Luke says nothing of the visiting Magi.

It is perhaps one of the most interesting yet demanding aspect of the bible stories that the gospel writers are not simply recalling the life of Jesus, but at the same time are recognising Jesus

as the one who could satisfy the ancient Jewish longing for an agent anointed by God who would restore the Jewish kingdom. Matthew's writing is as much theology as history.

In fact, the story of the Magi is particularly elusive. The derivation of that word seems to suggest them to be priests from Babylon, having a reputation for astrology and star observation. The description 'Kings' probably links with Isaiah, and the prophecy that the Messiah would be worshipped by kings, but that also has difficulties. Matthew's Gospel story seems to one of a conflict between God and earthly powers, not a situation where kings would be paying homage. Perhaps, we are currently happier with the description, 'Wise Men', but that also is questioned.

If the nature of the visitors to Jesus and their number remain uncertain, we can be more confident about the gifts that were brought – gold as a sign of earthly kingship, frankincense to recognise priesthood, and myrrh in anticipation of death. I am sure that it is more useful for our faith as Christians to reflect on the gifts that were bought, in the light of what we know about the death and resurrection of Jesus, than to struggle too much with the mysteries of the Wise Men and where they came from.

So, at Epiphany, we take time to give thanks for the birth of Christ, thanks that God took human form and lived in the world that he had created. In that one, amazing truth we come to realise the everyday nature of God and His love for us, His everyday people.

I wish you all an excellent new year, even if it is already one month old.

Paul Martin

LAST MONTH'S NEWS

At the end of November the annual Christmas Fayre was held in the Dorothy Parkes Centre where a festive note was sounded by the choir of Uplands Manor Primary School. The Fayre was a resounding success when a large number of the community enjoyed the wide variety of stalls and children enjoyed an early visit to Father Christmas. The grand sum of £1200 was raised for general church funds. A huge THANK YOU to all who helped with this event.

December saw the Discoverers last outing for 2012 when they met at the Toby Carvery, Quinton for a traditional Christmas dinner and to reminisce over the year's activities.

The season of Advent began with the traditional lighting of the first Advent candle during the morning service on 2nd December. Later that evening a service of Nine Readings and Hymns gave the opportunity to reflectively enter upon the period of waiting for the coming of Jesus.

The coming of Christmas was further heralded by a host of voices joined in harmony, singing carols at ASDA, Cape Hill. The generosity of shoppers and staff saw £176.10 raised for Sandwell Women's Aid Christmas Appeal. The evening was rounded off by a number of the carollers enjoying fine fellowship and food at The George, Warley.

Q.I.. “RESOLUTION”

- a promise, a resolve, a pledge to.....
- individual and corporate
- What God Wills - and How do I/We Respond?

“The Gate of the Year” *by M. Louise Haskins:*

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night
And He led me toward the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

So, heart, be still!
What need our little life.
Our human life, to know,
If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife
Of things both high and low
God hideth his intention.



JANUARY

- 6th **Feast of the Epiphany** (the Magi, “Wise Men” visit the Manger)
- 19th 11.00 am Cathedral - the **Licensing** by the Bishop of Paul Martin as Reader - All welcome to attend
- 20th 6.00 pm **Unity of Christians** locally for Week of Christian Unity at Holy Trinity with the Salvation Army band
- 21st 7.30 pm **St Matthews PCC**
- 23rd 7.30 pm **The Old Church PCC** meet in the Vicarage
- 31st 2.30 pm meet for **Prayers** in The Old Church (see Rosemary Guest for further details)
- 31st 7.00 pm **Compline** in The Old Church (see Wendy Fullerton for further details)

The U3A (**University of the Third Age**) are trying to set-up a new branch in our area to be called the Edgbaston North Branch. The first meeting will be held on Thursday 10th January at 2.00p.m. at the Portland Pavilion, Portland Road, B17 8LS.

WHY WE CAME TO OLD CHURCH & STAYED...

One Sunday there was a knock at the door. I opened it and a lady asked if I was a Christian and did I want to go to Old Church? My sister came and I followed some time later. It was such a welcoming atmosphere. It felt like home and after many years I am still here.

My brother had died. I was angry with God and was desolate and depressed. I promised God that if I got through this sad time I would come back to Him. I planned to try different churches with Old Church first on my list. When I arrived I felt as if the church had put its arms around me and embraced me and after many years I am still here.

I was lodging with a lady who worshipped at Old Church. One Sunday morning I came along with her to the service. I felt that I belonged and after many years I am still here.

After my husband died I felt completely lost and on my own. I had been to Old Church before so I decided to return. I felt welcome, made lots of friends and after many years I am still here.

It was Sunday morning. I woke up and felt the need to go to church. I decided to visit my local place of worship. You guessed! It was The Old Church. I came inside and felt comfortable and many years later I am still here.

I used to attend another local church. I came to Old Church to see what it was like. I felt welcome and after many years I am still here.

Many people feel that The Old Church exudes love and warmth. What is your opinion?