



St Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

**Epiphany 3 2021 8.30 am and 11 am**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Christmas is drawing to a close and next Sunday we shall keep the Feast of Candlemas, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and the Crib will be put away for another year.

Our daily and Sunday readings and reflections will turn from the 'Incarnation of the Eternal Word' to the 'Christ the Saviour of the World'.

The angels' joyous song of 'Glory to God in the Highest' will morph over nine weeks into a crowd's baying cries of 'Crucify' before we discover untold joy again in the exclamation of 'Alleluia' on Easter Day.

However, for one more week only (as they used to say in the best of theatres and cinemas), we are still in Christmas-tide, surrounded by angel choirs, startled shepherds and exotic wise men with their bizarre gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

So, cast your minds back to the arrival of the Magi who had travelled from the east to find the new-born King of the Jews and the words with which we opened our worship on the Feast of the Epiphany:

*Three wonders mark this day: today the star leads the Magi to the manger; today water is changed into wine at the marriage feast in Cana; today Christ is baptised by John in the river Jordan*

Three feasts for the price of one! Three deep mysteries wrapped in complex enigmas – and, the good news is, we have, not just one more week to explore and unwrap these mysteries, but the whole of the rest of our lives in which to do so.

The enigmatic riddles of Epiphany: the presentation of the Magi's gifts, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the changing of water on to wine, are laid before us, not to *confuse* us but to *enlighten* us, but to enlighten us in such a way that merely applying God-given faculties of deduction will never prove sufficient.

The mysteries of Epiphany, the manifestations of Christ, are like the Star of Bethlehem, or the messages of Gabriel to Mary and Joseph, things to wonder at and to ponder over.

When was the last time you 'wondered' – not 'wandered' but 'wondered'?

When was the last time you allowed your eyes to open to the size of saucers and your jaw to drop to your knees and you

felt the hairs on the back on your neck bristle and  
goosebumps run riot all over your whole body?

Epiphany invites us to *wonder*, and not just at the  
extraordinary or bizarre things in the Gospel stories of  
Christmas, but at the smallest things of small everyday things.

Time to pause whilst rinsing off a mug in the sink and to  
*wonder* at a soap bubble; time to stop and wonder as one  
bends down to tie a shoelace and to wonder, to marvel at the  
feel of leather and cotton; time to stop during a walk in the  
park and glimpse the smallest sign of spring hiding under a  
bush.

Time to be surprised, amazed, intrigued by ordinary every-  
day, taken-for-granted things, and to see them, perhaps for  
the very first time as the sacraments of God's love and grace.

This of course, is the stuff of poetry rather than prose, of song  
rather than speech, of art and dreaming rather than rational,  
business-like life – but they are the tools of wonder!

Gerald Manley Hopkins<sup>i</sup> and Elizabeth Barrett Browning<sup>ii</sup>  
knew how to stop and *wonder* and each captured something  
of this in their poetry.

First, here's Hopkins<sup>iii</sup>:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed.

Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

And this is from *Aurora Leigh*, arguably, Elizabeth Barrett's  
greatest work<sup>iv</sup>:

Look long enough  
On any peasant's face here, coarse and lined,  
You'll catch Antinous somewhere in that clay,  
As perfect featured as he yearns at Rome  
From marble pale with beauty ...

... an artist must,  
Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common stone  
With just his hand, and finds it suddenly  
A-piece with and conterminous to his soul.  
  
... man, the twofold creature, apprehends  
The twofold manner, in and outwardly,  
And nothing in the world comes single to him,  
A mere 'itself', cup, column, or candlestick,  
'There's nothing great Nor small' ...

... No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,  
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;

No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere;  
No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim;

And (glancing on my own thin, veined wrist),  
In such a little tremor of the blood The whole strong clamour  
of a vehement soul Doth utter itself distinct.

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries

Romantic poetic nonsense or the wisest of words?

*Earth crammed with heaven and every common bush afire  
with God* - or, just a few old blackberries?

*Nothing but trade, toil and smudge* or 'shook foi'l charged  
with the glory and grandeur and love of God.

Three wonders: the star leading the Magi to the manger;  
water changed into wine in Cana; Christ baptized by John in  
the river Jordan.

Life, the universe and everything – go figure, start *wondering!*

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<sup>i</sup> Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1899)

<sup>ii</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 – 1861)

<sup>iii</sup> *God's Grandeur*, written in 1877 and published posthumously in 1918

<sup>iv</sup> *Aurora Leigh*, published 1856