

11th – 17th January EPIPHANY – NEWSLETTER

“For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” (Matthew 2:2b)

Dear friends,

I am grateful for a time of rest that began on the evening of Christmas Day concluding a few days ago. I hope you have enjoyed Christmas and had some downtime in these early days of 2026. Pneumonia caught up with me again, but the complete rest ensured that it didn't stay long!

Sadly, the world has not started peacefully. Both troubles intentionally imposed and erupting unbidden have dominated news headlines. By marriage, I have a close relative whose family are Venezuelan. I also have close family with citizenship and residency in the USA. I had a long-departed favourite grandaunt, whose husband was Russian – and I wonder how he would have responded to yet another phase of disturbance in their nation's history. I read Diplomacy and International Relations for my Master's degree, where I found the international system of holding peace amongst all nation states assuring as it had prevailed since before the biblical time of The Epiphany. Broadly termed Diplomacy, nations show respect with order and protocols through emissaries of peace such as Ambassadors and High Commissioners, who represent the intention of peace between nations. We are witnessing nation leaders who believe themselves above this legacy of international respect, threatening world peace. But in The Epiphany, we find hope that defies such worldly desecration. That by God's leading through a terrestrial phenomenon, the miraculous following of that star brought strangers from afar in a common purpose greater than any human reasoning to the Saviour of the world. I have appended an Epiphany sermon by Rev'd Canon Tim Goode (York Minster), and hope that you also find it speaking deeply and helpfully to this.

Here are words from the Bible and some thoughtful reflections for encouragement:

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

Now we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this surpassingly great power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on all sides, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

**She prayed the painful
prayers, the heavy
prayers, the messy
prayers that no one
knew about. And God
heard them all.**

The world is both burning & blooming.

You get the bad news
and the sunrise in the same day.
You cry over the headlines,
then you laugh at a baby
wearing a hat shaped like a bear.
This is the dual citizenship
of being alive.
Rage and reverence,
Grief and grace.
You are allowed to feel both.
You are allowed to scream,
& still notice how good the soup is.
You don't have to choose.
Let it all in.



SERVICES ON THE SUNDAY 11TH JANUARY:

Baptism of Christ in Staindrop and Ingleton; The Epiphany (tr) in Winston and Gainford

9.15am	Staindrop St Mary	Holy Communion	Rev'd Susanne Jukes
9.30am	Winston St Andrew	Holy Communion	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop, Sarah Fells preaching
10.45am	Gainford St Mary	Holy Communion	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop, Sarah Fells preaching
11am	Ingleton St John	Holy Communion	Rev'd Susanne Jukes
5pm	Gainford St Mary	CHORAL EVENSONG	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

An invitation from REV'D MOJI JAIYESIMI to her Licensing as Associate Priest in St Mary's, Cockerton, Darlington: Everyone is invited on Sunday 25th of January 2026 at 6.30pm
If you wish to contact Moji, please email her: mojijay@yahoo.com

NOTICES:

- † **DONATIONS** from the Carol Service in Gainford St Mary's led by Churches Together in Gainford amounted to £303, and was divided equally between The Children's Society, Cuthbert Care and Action for Children. It is 15% up on last year. Thank you to all who contributed.
- † **PARISHES BIBLE STUDY** 'Jesus, Light of the world, shine in our darkness'. Our Ordinand in Training Sarah Fells and Lay Minister in Training on Placement Peter Craig are leading 4 sessions exploring the bible to learn more about this Wonderful Light- how to live in it and how to share it with others. **Come along at 7-8pm, 2 Olivers Gardens, Staindrop on 13th, 20th, 27th January and 3rd February.**
- † **GATHER LIFEGROUP RESUMES ON THURSDAY 29th JANUARY at 7pm, 2 Academy Gardens, Gainford**, learning about and from the Minor Prophets, beginning with the Prophet Joel. The 2nd meeting will be on Thursday 5th February in Winston. **Please contact Sheila for information:** info@gatherchurchteesdale.com
- † **PCC MEETINGS: We have vacancies on our PCCs.** Our PCCs meet about 6 times a year. Being a member of a PCC is an important and valued role that does not require much time nor does it involve many tasks. PCC officers do have particular tasks and responsibilities, and they are invaluable to the running and life of our churches. **Please consider joining a PCC if you're not already a PCC member.** Email me on ekgharrop@gmail.com
 - **Ingleton St John's PCC is meeting on Monday 12th January 6pm at the church**
 - **Gainford St Mary's PCC is meeting on Wednesday 14th January 7pm at 5 Tees View, Gainford (Jill's)**
 - **Winston St Andrew's PCC is meeting on Monday 19th January 7pm at the Village Hall**
 - **Staindrop St Mary's PCC is meeting on Tuesday 27th January 4pm at 32 North Green, Staindrop (Linda's)**
 - Staindrop PCC will have vacancies for churchwardens and treasurer, please get in touch with our churchwarden Linda: linda.hausmanis@gmail.com
- † **Regular events and groups:** We hope you'd find a warm welcome to all our groups. We'd also welcome anyone joining our teams who prepare and help run them.
 - **WARM & WELCOME (community-led) every Friday 10am Gainford Village Hall**
 - **STAINDROP COFFEE MORNING 2nd Friday 10am Scarth Hall**
 - **TEA & CHAT 3rd Mondays 2pm Winston Village Hall**



The Vicarage telephone landline is down. Please use my mobile number 07976676098 if you need to get in touch by phone. Thanks.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

COLLECT for the EPIPHANY (G&W)

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

COLLECT for BAPTISM OF CHRIST

(S&I)

Eternal Father,
who at the baptism of Jesus
revealed him to be your Son,
anointing him with the Holy Spirit:
grant to us, who are born again by water and
the Spirit,
that we may be faithful to our calling as your
adopted children;
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

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

A prayer written in the 1700s by John Wesley: A Covenant with God

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.'
Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Lord of all time and eternity,
you opened the heavens and revealed yourself
as Father
in the baptism of Jesus your beloved Son:
by the power of your Spirit
complete the heavenly work of our rebirth
through the waters of the new creation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

First Reading (The Epiphany): Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

The Gospel (The Epiphany): Matthew 2:1-12

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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.' ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
⁶ "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."

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.' ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Feast of the Epiphany Sermon 2026 (Rev'd Canon Tim Goode)

For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage. (Matthew 2:2b)

The Feast of the Epiphany begins with people who notice what others ignore. While kings are guarding power, priests are guarding tradition, and empires are guarding their borders, a small group of outsiders pay attention to the sky - and allow what they see to disturb them. They notice something that does not fit their settled explanations of how the world works. And instead of dismissing it, explaining it away, or domesticating it, they follow it. That decision - to notice, to attend, to follow - is the real drama of Epiphany.

This feast is not about God suddenly arriving on the scene. God has already come. Epiphany is about the slow, risky awakening of human attention. It is about learning to recognise what has been present all along but has not yet been received. At the heart of Epiphany lies a gift without which faith itself withers: the gift of imagination.

Imagination is not fantasy or escapism. It is not wishful thinking or religious decoration. Imagination is the human capacity to hold open the possibility that reality is more spacious, more relational, and more surprising than our assumptions allow. It is the ability to resist shrinking the world to what feels manageable or safe. And it is this fragile, easily suppressed gift that sits at the centre of the Epiphany story.

The Magi are people shaped by imagination. They notice something that interrupts their usual patterns of meaning, and rather than closing it down, they allow it to call them into change - re-orienting their lives, re-shaping their journeys, and drawing them into a vocation they had not yet named. They imagine that the heavens might be speaking. They imagine that the birth of a child, far from palaces and power, could be bound up with the hopes of the world. They imagine themselves into a story that is not their own - and that imaginative leap sets them on a path marked by risk, generosity, and vulnerability.

Without imagination, there is no Epiphany.

The Magi do not begin with certainty. They begin with attentiveness. Their faithfulness lies not in possessing the right answers, but in refusing to close the mystery too quickly. They are willing to follow a question rather than control a conclusion. And this matters, because imagination is the gateway to empathy. To imagine that another person's story matters. To imagine that God might be at work beyond the boundaries we have drawn. To imagine that vulnerability, rather than dominance, might be the place where truth is disclosed.

This is precisely why Epiphany is so unsettling - and why it remains such a threat to systems built on fear and control. For imagination destabilises the stories that tell us the world must remain exactly as it is. It loosens the grip of inevitability. It makes room for mercy. And it is here that Epiphany collides sharply with our contemporary culture wars.

Culture wars are not sustained primarily by argument. They are sustained by the deliberate narrowing of imagination. They train us to see the world in rigid binaries: us and them, pure and impure, deserving and undeserving. They reward certainty and punish curiosity. They teach us to stop imagining the interior lives of others - their histories, their wounds, their fears.

When imagination contracts, empathy soon follows suit. If I no longer imagine your fear, I can dismiss your need. If I no longer imagine your vulnerability, I can justify your exclusion. If I no longer imagine your humanity, cruelty becomes possible - even respectable.

The tragedy of culture wars is not only that they divide communities; it is that they diminish our shared humanity. They train us to protect our position rather than attend to one another. They make selfishness feel like strength and indifference feel like virtue. Epiphany stands as a refusal of that narrowing of the human spirit.

Notice what happens when the Magi finally arrive. They do not interrogate the child. They do not demand proof or explanation. They do not attempt to master what they encounter. Instead, they respond with reverence, generosity, and humility. They kneel - not because they understand everything, but because they recognise that they are in the presence of something that exceeds them. Here is imagination shaped by humility rather than control.

Their gifts are not a transaction. They are not payment for certainty or insurance against risk. They are acts of recognition - ways of honouring what they do not fully comprehend. This posture stands in stark contrast to the culture-war instinct to dominate, define, and defeat.

Epiphany reveals a God who refuses to be known through force. The child at the centre of the story does not assert authority or prove worth. God entrusts the truth of the incarnation to the slow, vulnerable work of human attentiveness and love - to the willingness of strangers to recognise holiness without controlling it. And this has consequences for how we live.

If God chooses to be revealed in a body that is dependent, fragile, and exposed, then imagination becomes an ethical responsibility. To encounter such a God is to be invited into a way of attending others that resists fear and reduction: to imagine that the person we are tempted to dismiss carries a story we do not know; to imagine that the person we disagree with is more than the label we have given them; to imagine that the one rendered invisible by our systems bears the image of God. When imagination is alive, empathy becomes possible. And when empathy is possible, cruelty becomes harder to justify.

Matthew tells us that the Magi return home by another road. This is not a sentimental detail; it is a spiritual truth. Once imagination has been expanded - once empathy has been awakened - the old routes no longer suffice.

Epiphany changes the map. It changes how we attend to others. It changes who we recognise as neighbour. And so Epiphany presses a question upon the Church today:

Are we a community that expands imagination - or one that polices it? Do our words make space for empathy - or do they shrink it? Do we help people imagine themselves into the lives of others - or do we reinforce the fears that make exclusion feel necessary?

God has already come among us - not as an idea to be defended, but as a life to be attended to. The question Epiphany leaves with us is not whether God has been revealed, but whether we will allow our imagination to be stretched enough to become more fully human in response.

Amen.