

Weekly Message from Fr William for the Baptism of the Lord 2023

Dear People of St Mary's,

The Christmas season ends with two final high points – The Epiphany of the Lord; and The Baptism of the Lord – like two final bursts in a firework display, or two final blasts in the closing sequence of a great orchestral work. I'm sure I'll be talking to you about The Baptism of the Lord at Mass this Sunday, so here's a few thoughts on the Epiphany.

On Christmas Day, that first Christmas Day, God comes to the world. On the Epiphany, that first Epiphany, the world comes to God. Wise men, the 'Magi', come from distant lands. They come to Bethlehem. They come to God in Bethlehem, born of Mary, born into this world, born to be Emmanuel = God-with-us. There may have been only a handful of these Magi, these wise men. But coming from distant lands this is symbolic of the whole world coming to God. And practically speaking this is the first trickle of people coming to God, a first trickle that will swell over the subsequent days and years and subsequent centuries to become a great river of people in their billions, and from every continent and country down the ages, coming to God. He is the light of the world.

'Arise, shine out Jerusalem, for you light has come...

The nations come to your light
and kings to your dawning brightness.

Lift up your eyes and look round:
all are assembling and coming towards you,
your sons from far away
and your daughters being tenderly carried.'

That's Isaiah. It's the first reading for the feast of the Epiphany.

And in response to this first reading we sing Psalm 71: 'All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord.'

The Epiphany is sometimes considered the fourth greatest feast in the Christian calendar, after Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday and Christmas Day, or maybe the fifth after the Ascension. It's a Greek word meaning 'appearing' or 'manifestation'. We're celebrating the appearing of God to the world, or the manifestation of God to the world.

In the last few years in England and Wales our celebration of The Epiphany of the Lord has been restored to its traditional date 6th January, the Twelfth Day of Christmas, rather than to the nearest Sunday. So it's a Friday this year.

I hope you're celebrating these final two blasts of the Christmas season!



The Baptism of the Lord, Sunday 8th January 2023