



The Diocese of
Southwark

Season of Lay Ministries

Epiphany Sunday

The Baptism of Christ*

7 January 2024

A story of calling and response

Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72: 1-15

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

‘Open our ears, O Lord,
to hear your word and know your voice,
Speak to our hearts and strengthen our will.’ Amen.

I often feel that celebrating the Epiphany is a better way to begin a new year, more so than the big over the top New Year’s Eve parties on 31st December. Each year we begin a new unknown journey.

This gospel story is about three people going on a journey to meet Jesus. Each of us is on this same journey together. We journey to find Jesus and to worship him. I like to think of our journey as a pilgrimage. Life itself is a pilgrimage and our life as Christians is a pilgrimage.

Our vocation in life is also a type of Journey and we hear a number of different journeys and vocations in our scriptures. We hear the journey of Abraham being told to go to the land that God will show him. The Israelites who travel through the wilderness on their way to the promised land. And Mary and Joseph who make the journey to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus.

This story isn’t just a story about three individuals deciding to go and give gifts to the next King, in order to earn favour or brownie points. This is a story of calling and response, both of which are two separate aspects of the notion of ‘vocation.’ These individuals responded to the call to journey to meet the expected Messiah.

This passage is also a reminder to each of us, that we are set apart for God’s purposes. Just like the

magi before us, we are all called to find and worship the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. Through our own Baptism, each one of us is united in union with Jesus. The magi are forever changed by their encounter with the child Jesus. They will never be the same again.

But what about us?

When we encounter Christ, aren’t our lives changed?

Yes, when we first encounter Christ in the waters of Baptism, our lives are forever changed. When we are baptised the heavens open and God calls each of us by name - it doesn’t matter if we go by Danny, Dan or Daniel, God calls, and our souls respond. Young or old, we accept the call to follow Christ and journey towards serving him the best we can in our lives. We go home with a new identity and mission. We are now children of God; children of another kingdom, and our journey will take us by another road.

Our identity in Christ, as a baptised community is also a call to follow him and continue to proclaim the good news, passed down through the centuries from the time of the Magi - even to this very day, in January 2024. There is a long list of people before us who have helped bring us to this day and help shape who we are.

Some of these people may have responded to a calling from God to help shape who we are - some of these people may have encouraged us to respond also.

This Sunday we begin our Season of Lay ministries. This is a time for us all to listen and encourage ourselves and those in our parishes to explore how God might be calling in our lives. There are many pathways for each of us to share our talents and live out our calling to follow Christ as a Lay person.

I was licensed as a Lay Pioneer last October and I give thanks to God for the opportunity I have, to bring

the Good News of Jesus Christ to those outside our church walls in the wider community. This morning I am here in my workplace, a busy pub in south London - imitating the Word in my life and sharing the Good News with others.

Looking back at when I began to recognise my call to ministry - the words of St Teresa of Ávila always comes to mind.

*'Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world.'*

I can remember hearing these words being sung by the Irish hymn writer, Liam Lawton, in a church a number of years ago in Ireland, and these words resonating within me. I wonder what the Magi must have experienced when they decided to begin their journey and follow the star they saw in the night sky?

Throughout my journey to this point today, I have often reflected on the power of words. Words have the power to heal or to hurt, to inspire or to stop, to enact freedom or to impose oppression. However, the right word at the right time can be transformative. Words can change a life or change a society.

I invite you to recall moments in your own life. Perhaps you were listening to a sermon, a hymn, or a scripture reading and suddenly those words become words that were addressed directly to you.

It is in moments like this that 'vocation' or 'calling' can take place - when you hear the voice of God in your heart and in your mind. This can sometimes be in a way you cannot describe, and when that happens, there is no turning back because the Word of God has a life of its own in your life.

I am grateful that today we begin our Season of Lay Ministries - a time for all of us to stop, reflect, and consider...is God calling me to serve him in my daily life? Calling takes many forms such as a Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary, Church Evangelist, a Lay Reader or as a Lay Pioneer.

Like me - many of us probably question whether we are good enough to serve God and the church, and yet God calls us knowing our imperfections.

Now, back to the Magi. The magi journey and find Jesus with his mother Mary and kneel down, pay him homage and present Jesus with gifts of gold,

frankincense, and myrrh. It's a beautiful description of our vocation when you think about it. We come without any kind of agenda. But simply to worship Jesus. And to offer him the gift of ourselves.

It is a New Year, and none of us knows what this year holds for us, or for our world. But we don't need to know because we know that wherever this year takes us, Jesus our Emmanuel will be with us on the Journey.

Ethan Glackin-McColgan
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*For use when Epiphany is transferred from Saturday 6 January

A prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries 2024

Written by Marie Williams, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA), Holy Saviour, Croydon

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' Isaiah 6:8 (NRSV)

Lord Jesus,
We give you thanks that
you consider us worthy to serve you
and have called us into ministries of many
different kinds.
We pray for all those who are exploring what God's
call means in their lives.
Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they
listen for God's voice.
And we pray for those already in ministry that
as they carry out your work you will help them to
demonstrate your love,
your compassion and your truth
so that others may see your beauty and embrace
you as Lord and Saviour
We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Suggested prayer

Loving God,
whose son called Andrew
to be a witness and an apostle;
give us the confidence
to bring others to see Jesus,
to follow him
and then go and tell others,
that the light of Christ
may shine in our lives.
Amen.

Suggested hymns

Be Still For The Presence of the Lord
The Lord Is My Light, Taizé Community
Light of the World - Matt Redman
O God, Who by a Star Did Guide
I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
In Christ Alone
Arise, Shine out your light has come
Come and join the celebration
Long Ago Prophets Knew
Light a candle flame
We three Kings of Orient are
The First Nowell
In the Bleak Mid-winter
All Hail the power of Jesus name
Alleluia Sing to Jesus