

Thought for the Day

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

5th January

John 2.1-12

Today is the 12th and last day of the Feast of Christmas.

Tomorrow is the feast of Epiphany, which churches may celebrate on the previous Sunday. Epiphany marks the arrival of the Magi following the star as recounted in Matthew chapter 2, which strictly speaking is a separate occasion from the nativity of Jesus and should not be rolled into the Christmas story, although we often do. The family are in a house now, there is no mention of a manger. Jesus could have been up to 2 years old, as Herod in his fear and paranoia commanded children up to 2 to be killed.

Today the readings invite us to reflect on other occasions of Epiphany, or revelation, showing. Glimpses of the real nature of significance of Jesus, as the Magi perceived him to be king, high priest and supreme sacrifice.

John's gospel presents us with seven 'signs' – not miracles but signs, revealing his true identity and mission. This is the first; the turning of water into wine. The end of the narrative makes this clear – 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory.' And the reason? 'and his disciples believed in him'. The signs were like clues, laid for those who were watching, who were on the lookout, rather like the Magi watching the skies and reading the signs in the stars.

Now if you are not keen on wine or if you don't drink alcohol, this won't work for you! But in a time and culture where wine was considered of much greater value, where wine was considered a gift from God and to be teetotal was exceptional, this was a powerful image. The transformation of water into wine showed in microcosm the transformation that Christ would bring to the world.

And the quantity, the vast and totally unnecessary quantity (for the wedding) illustrated the overflowing plenty of God's love and salvation.

I love this aspect of the story. There is so much of God's love, it is just sloshed around any old how, and it really doesn't matter if it's not noticed, there is always loads more. There is no question of our ever reaching the bottom of God's love.

We see this idea beginning in the OT when Elisha and the widow lived on a drop of oil and a handful of flour right through the famine. We see it more in the feeding of the 5000 when 12 baskets of leftovers were taken up. We see it here as the something like 150 gallons of water becomes extra wine for a village wedding party. That's about 700 litres or 930 bottles of wine. You do see what I mean!

This epiphany is both a sign, revealing, and is hidden. The Magi seemed to be the only ones who recognised the meaning of the star. Most of the wedding guests were oblivious to the wine issue.

As the signs continue through the gospel, more people become aware of what is happening but even then they don't necessarily believe as a result. Seeing is not necessarily believing, at all. We choose what to see and how to interpret it, what to make of it. We are perfectly capable of closing our eyes and our minds to that which we do not wish to see.

And God invites us to open our eyes, but God will not prise them open by force. It is up to us. Hence all that Jesus says in this gospel about how blind his enemies were; hence the sign of giving sight to the man blind from birth, who opens his eyes and says 'Lord, I believe'. A good prayer for this time and every time of year is this one from the Psalms: 'Open my eyes O Lord, that I may see the wonders of your law'.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*