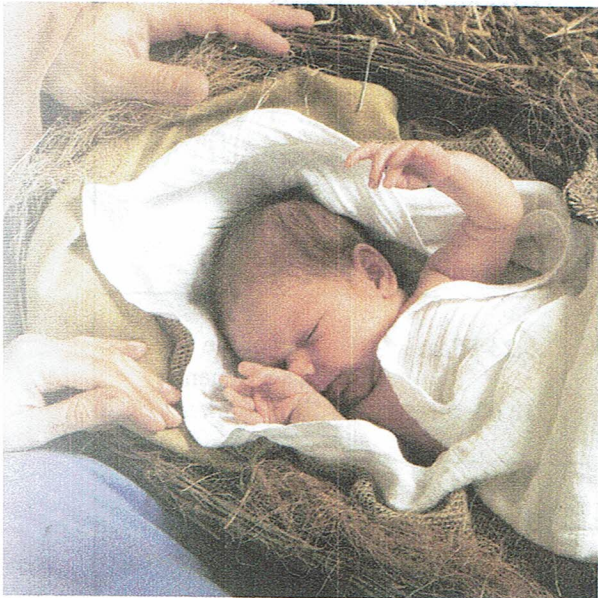


SUNDAY PLUS

Little and loved

Little and transforming



by Catherine Pepinster

The prophet Isaiah foretells the gifts that the Wise Men will bring to the child Jesus in Bethlehem: gifts of “gold and incense”, he says, the most luxurious items that they could bestow on a king, as well as the frankincense mentioned by Matthew. But this is an unexpected king – a baby. Indeed, everything about the scene is unexpected. God has become human. A virgin has borne a child. This king lives in poverty. And this stable has room for everyone to worship this king: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. Even Herod is perturbed when the Wise Men tell him they have come to see the infant king. Nothing here is predictable.

It is unexpected, too, that the shepherds might have come into the presence of Jesus

before the Magi. Shepherds were amongst the lowest in society at the time, outsiders who scraped a living and lived among their animals. The Wise Men have to take their turn.

But for all of them who come to the stable, the moment is one of epiphany, or revelation. Life cannot be the same again. The Wise Men go home by a different way, warned in a dream not to go back to Herod to tell him what they have seen. But the different journey also symbolises a new life. This birth has turned the world upside down. It is not money, or power, or influence that matters in that Bethlehem stable. It is a tiny child, loved by those who visit him, and who brings a message of love.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of The Tablet and the author of The Keys and the Kingdom – the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis, published by T&T Clark.

Little and gifting

by Gerlinde Symons

At our weekly prayer group in the prison chapel, we sit together in a circle, with a lighted candle in the centre. It's there to remind us that God is present with us and that he is the light in our darkness. At the end, I ask the men to go back to their wings or workshops and be that light to those who are struggling. Prison is a place of great suffering where many struggle with guilt, fear, loneliness and hopelessness. So there are many opportunities for the group to bring God's light and his love to those who are suffering.

In our Gospel reading today, we hear how the Magi followed the star that led them to the infant Jesus, where they knelt down and worshipped him. They had an “epiphany” because they realised that Jesus was the Son of God, who was

making himself known to the world.

On this feast of Epiphany, may you, like the Magi, be guided by the light and be a light to those around you.

Gerlinde Symons is a lay Catholic chaplain in two UK prisons.

Justified joy

by Liam Sheridan

Parents love to show off their children. There is something about a new baby that can prompt total strangers to engage in conversation. It cuts across barriers and draws people in. For the Magi, overjoyed at the Christ-child, it led them on a journey they would never forget and which we celebrate today.

So too, God's love has a habit of cutting across the divisions that so entice and entangle us. In the Old Testament, Israel's light was not only for her benefit but the surrounding nations.

Now, supremely in Christ, says Paul, all are heirs together; members of one body together; and sharers in the promise, together. Think about your church. Are there old disagreements or unforgiven wrongs that need healing?

Is God calling you to restore a relationship? We have been shown the way. Our challenge is to follow God's example by making the first move: towards restoration.

Liam Sheridan is a lawyer and father of three.

Lord, the Magi travelled long distances to find you. It sometimes feels as though my journey is long and bumpy before I find you waiting for me at the end of the road. Help me when I feel a bit lost and in need of your guiding star. Amen.

“Contemplating the baby Jesus, with his humble and infinite love, let us say to him, very simply: ‘Thank you for doing all this for me!’”

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday:
1 John 3:22 – 4:6
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Tuesday:
1 John 4:7-10
Mark 6:34-44

Wednesday:
1 John 4:11-18
Mark 6:45-52

Thursday:
1 John 4:19 – 5:4
Luke 4:14-22

Friday:
1 John 5:5-13
Luke 5:12-16

Saturday:
1 John 5:14-21
John 3:22-30

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22