

## Christian Aid – reflection and prayer

### *The Feast of Epiphany*

Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2: 1-12

The Feast of the Epiphany on 6 January, traditionally the 12th day of Christmas in the season of the Incarnation, is a time of gifts. It celebrates:

- The revelation of God the Son as a human being in Jesus Christ
- The visit of the Magi (or Three Kings, or Wise Men) to the baby Jesus, and their bringing of gifts.
- Eastern Christians remember the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, seen as his manifestation to the world as the Son of God

In many parts of the world, Epiphany is marked by feasting, special food, different local customs and the giving of gifts (in some places, the gifts which Christians in the west exchange on Christmas Day are given at Epiphany).

And in the midst of the greyness and gloom of western winter days, we peer through the tinsel and tawdriness of so much of our commercial Christmas to find the precious jewel at the centre; the Nativity, that birth, that magical story of mystery and angels and starlight and song that glows through time and space to lighten our darkness, to warm our hearts, to dazzle our senses. And so we should, because it is indeed infinitely precious, that moment of love and self-sacrifice and cherishing, that moment of freely-chosen obedience and risk and hope, that moment of God speaking. Indeed, the glory of the Lord has risen upon us. (*Is. 60, 1*)

But we should not forget that the precious jewel of the Incarnation does not sit outside history like a gem in a glass case or a scene in one of the paperweights that children shake. The birth of Jesus took place in a real world of corruption and power-politics and military occupation. It took place in our world. And Mary and Joseph, just as we do, had to struggle with the interface between personal hopes and political struggles.

In today's gospel, we can see just how much is happening, how much is going on around this insignificant Jewish couple, not just in the birth but in its aftermath. Strange visitors travel bearing gifts, somewhat unsuitable for a baby, but well-intentioned. But the outcome of their journeying was something different; a brutal military repression set in motion unintentionally by the foreigners whose well-meaning arrival in the wrong place aroused suspicions and created new dangers.

And the outcome of that well-intentioned visit was flight into Egypt for Mary, Joseph and Jesus as refugees, asylum-seekers feeling in fear, political power interfering with the personal hopes of one small family – and a devastating massacre of innocents. These are

circumstances Christian Aid is, unhappily, all too familiar with. They describe many of the humanitarian emergencies we, though our partners, respond to.

In this time of gifts, as we celebrate above all the gift of Jesus, God-with-us, we can be grateful for all the gifts of our lives. And we can give thanks that it is not in spite of the fallible and corruptible events of the world that God acts, but through them; not by standing apart from them but by transforming them. And that the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, is not a political programme or a religious doctrine or a church law, but rather a *way*, a stance, a decision. It is in that very difficult place where the personal meets the political, where *our* needs and hopes encounter the needs and hopes of our fellow men and women, that we walk the Way, give flesh to the Word, have the opportunity to do what the angels cannot do—change a world of hurt and shame into a world of justice, love and peace. At every moment, Christ seeks to be born in us, just as at every moment, Christ brings us to die and to rise to new life. The gift and the hope of Jesus go beyond optimism into a divine reality in which the means of love are never lost or wasted, and cannot finally be overcome.

### **Prayer**

Christ of the East,  
Christ of the South,  
Christ of the West,  
Christ of the North:

We turn our hearts to you  
hoping and praying for  
peace and life  
to dispel the shadows  
of war and death.

We turn our faces to you  
trusting and believing for  
love and grace  
to shine upon us and  
to radiate to all.

We turn our lives to you  
even if we know only in part  
what we will one day know fully  
even as we are fully known.  
And now may faith hope and love,  
love most of all,  
abide in us as we journey together through this year.  
Amen.

**The weekly pointers for Epiphany were taken from material written by Rev Dr Kathy Galloway, Co-leader of the Iona Community and former head of Christian Aid Scotland.**

Points for prayer can be found in the [weekly prayer diary](#)

Source: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/weekly-worship-5-january>