

Risen Christ



The Epiphany of the Lord

4 & 5 January 2025 - Year C

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for that is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

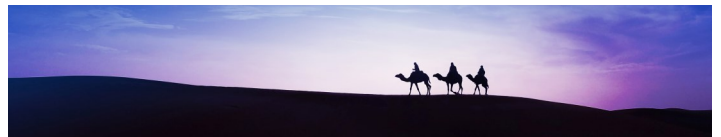
Reflection - Break Open the Word 2025:

Camels and kings often appear on Christmas cards. Today the wise men appear in the Christmas crib. The gospel story says nothing about camels, does not call them kings and does not tell us how many there were (only that they brought three gifts). Read the story with fresh eyes.

It is an inspiring story of those who seek the truth, often despite considerable hardship. It is an exciting story of naivety and cunning, of deception and betrayal. It is a delightful and joyous story of a mission accomplished. It culminates with revelation, acknowledgement and adoration.

Reading this story convincingly presents some major challenges. The long quote from the prophet should be heard as a quotation. The voice will need to be dropped. Then the response of Herod: *...let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage* needs to be obviously ironical in tone. It should finish with a sense of wonder (except the last sentence which is matter-of-fact information giving).

In this narrative, Matthew identifies the Christ-child as the long-awaited messiah, he anticipates the apostles' mission to preach the good news to all nations (28:19) and, in an atmosphere of menace, he offers a premonition of Jesus' saving death on the cross.



Let us pray for all those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith ...

Montmorency

For those in need of **healing**,
remembering especially:

*Terry Kean, Debbie Edgley (nee Vanderwert),
Leon Gray, Siobhan Lappin,
Graeme Layton, Frances McDonald,
Cindy & Ed Morrissey, Pauline Murphy,
Regina Roszczenko (mother of Liz Gray)
Jeanette Steward, Skye Stojanov*

For those whose **anniversaries**
are at this time:

Margaret Farrell, Pat Heagerty

Eltham

For those in need of **healing**,
remembering especially:

*Penny Boyce, Maurice Brosnan, Ruth Decker,
Shannon Donahoo, Mary Luttick,
Rosemary Scully*

To include an anniversary please contact Parish Office
9435 4742 or RisenChrist.Parish@cam.org.au.

*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



FRAGILE HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Without the malevolent meddling of President Vladimir Putin, Bashar al-Assad would have been ousted from the presidency of Syria long ago. Only Russian military support kept him in power, which means the suffering of the Syrian people and the butchery of the regime lie partly at Putin's door. How many hundreds of thousands of lives were lost will never be clear, many dying under torture in Assad's notorious prisons. Millions of refugees, many of them young men who refused to serve in Assad's army, will now want to return to their homeland. They fled for a taste of freedom, some to Britain, and - mixed though their experiences of the West may have been - one of the hopes for the future of Syria is that they will take back with them something of its values.

One of the most vital lessons the West has to teach is that it is possible to live in peace with one's neighbours despite profound difference in religion and ethnic identity. Syrian diversity may have made Assad's job as dictator easier, not least his appeal to the loyalty of his fellow Alawites in the regions where they cluster. However, even they seem to have turned against him. They are a distinct group that originated within Shia Islam, but they constitute only about 12 per cent of the population. Iran, a majority Shia country under the oppressive rule of the Ayatollahs, treated Assad as a Shia client in an unholy alliance with Russia.

Most other Syrians are Sunni Muslims, though not necessarily united as one body, and there are several minority groups, including a number of Christian communities, some of which are Catholic. Iran's involvement made the Syrian civil war an extension of the centuries'-old rivalry between the Shia and Sunni versions of Islam. For instance, Iran sponsors Hezbollah, a Shia militant movement based in Lebanon, on Israel's

northern border. Iran's theocratic leaders - with the dwindling support of the Iranian people - have a restless urge to dominate the whole Muslim world. The rest of the Muslim world is not interested in being dominated by what it regards as a heretical movement on the fringe of Islam. It has its own blend of moderates and fundamentalists, and does not need to import more of them.

From a western perspective, Assad's fall is a blow against Russia, which was too distracted by its campaign in Ukraine to be able to spare military resources to help him. The Russian interest has been mainly directed at keeping its air and naval bases on the eastern Mediterranean coast. From an Israeli perspective, every setback for Iran is a victory, for Iran is its principal foe in the region.

Yet for all these gains and losses, the future is very uncertain. The main, though not the only, fighting force which defeated Assad's army, or caused it to run away, was Hayat Tahrir-al Sham. It has a jihadist heritage and was affiliated to al-Qaeda, but claims to have abandoned extremism and has made promises to respect minority rights. Nevertheless, the prospect of renewed civil war is by no means inconceivable. Israeli forces are meddling, and Turkey is nervous that Syria's Kurdish areas could bring more trouble. Even so, the biggest hope for peace could be if Iran realises that Assad's fall, allied to the weakening of Hezbollah by Israeli action and by Russian disengagement, has rendered its Shia hegemony strategy futile and its all-but-war against Israel hopeless. In Syria, as in the whole region, there is just a glimmer of hope that the philosophy and politics of "live and let live" might now, at last, stand a reasonable chance.



THE REIGN OF GOD

An Attractive Alternative

Richard Rohr emphasises how community is at the heart of the reign of God:

The world has suffered much from the various forms of Christian colonialism. Yet the reign of God is an alternative to domination systems and all "isms". Jesus teaches that right relationship (that is, love) is the ultimate and daily criterion. If a social order allows and encourages strong connectedness between people and creation, people and each other, people and God, then we have a truly sacred culture: the reign of God. It wouldn't be a world without pain or mystery, but simply a world where we are connected and in communion with all things.

God's reign is about union and communion, which means that it's also about mercy, forgiveness, nonviolence, letting go, solidarity, service and lives of love, patience, and simplicity. Who can doubt that this is the sum and substance of Jesus' teaching? In the reign of God, the very motives for rivalry, greed, and violence have been destroyed. We know we're all part of God's beloved community.

Palestinian Anglican priest Naim Ateek emphasises Jesus' call to community and peacemaking:

Jesus called into community a small group of people. They were his disciples and friends. He taught them the essence of faith - the love of God and the love of neighbour - and he became a role model to them. When they asked him to teach them to pray, he taught them to pray for the coming of God's kingdom: "Your kingdom come, your will be done". If you want to be children of God, he said, you need to be engaged in peacemaking; if you want to imitate God and be God's children, you have to love your enemies and to pray for those that persecute you. If you want to resist evil, do not use evil methods. You have to practice forgiveness and reconciliation. You must be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Fr Richard continues:

Every description Jesus offers of God's reign - of love, relationship, non-judgment, and forgiveness, where the last shall be first and the first shall be last - shows that any imposition on God's side is an impossibility! Wherever we've tried to force Christianity on people, the long-term results have been disastrous. The gospel flourishes in the realm of true freedom.

But it's a freedom we must choose for ourselves. It is almost impossible to turn away from what seems like the only game in town (political, economic, or religious), unless we have glimpsed a more attractive alternative. It's hard to imagine it, much less imitate it, unless we see someone else do it first. Jesus is that icon of the more attractive alternative, a living parable. Jesus has forever changed our human imagination, and we are now both burdened and gladdened by new possibility. There is good news to counter the deadening bad news, but we first have to be turned away from a conventional way of understanding.

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/an-attractive-alternative/>