

Epiphany 2021

You may have thought by this stage of Christmas that you'd seen the last of sherry trifle. It's been haunting you from the back of the fridge for days... or its been calling to you as a Nigella-style indulgent midnight treat. Well, it's still here. In fact, today is all about sherry trifle. If my mother had been a Magi it's probably what she would have brought to the infant Saviour, but that's not why today is all about sherry trifle. It's because today, the Feast of the Manifestation of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Commonly called Epiphany) is all about *layers*.

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning 'manifestation' 'showing' 'revelation' 'appearance'. It is a Greek word because this feast has its origins not in Rome (like so many of our Christian traditions) but to the East of the Mediterranean. The Greek-speaking eastern Church celebrates both the Birth of Christ and the Manifestation on the same day, January 6th, while the Latin-speaking western Church celebrates one on December 25th and the other a few days later.

But that is just the sponge and sherry: the birth itself, and the realization of what this means for the world – not just

for the Hebrews but for the *world*, the universe even: birds, bees, rocks spinning in the outer arm of the galaxy.

The nature of life itself is changed by the coming of God in Christ. The Magi represent us gentiles and the *whole* of the creation coming to realise who Jesus is.

But that's just the sponge and sherry. There are more layers to come... Today and in the Sundays to follow we celebrate also the baptism of Christ by St John Baptist in the Jordan, and His first miracle: water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. These great moments of manifestation/realization/Epiphany form the cream and custard and jam. Notice there is no jelly – I am very orthodox on this point, jelly in trifle is heresy, clearly.

Epiphany layers up these moments in the life of Christ, which only when swallowed together even *begin* to communicate the magnitude of the mystery, the earth-shattering newness, and life-changing reality of what we celebrated a few days ago: 'That God was man in Palestine, and lives today in Bread and Wine'

The wise men probably didn't turn up a few days, let alone the tidy and theologically significant 12 days after the birth of Jesus (always pay attention to numbers in Scripture, they always have layers too). But how wonderful it is that we get to celebrate the realization/manifestation of Christ at the

beginning of each new year. After the catastrophe we are all mightily relieved to have got shot of called '2020', and in the face of a tricky year ahead,

we are armed by Holy Mother Church with the great gift that life has a meaning and purpose and hope deeper and greater and truer than *even* Brexit, lockdown, dry January or bank accounts emptied by Christmas indulgence.

And what's more this truth isn't a theory held in our heads, it is a reality lived in our lives and a relationship that we are invited to actual live day to day.

Today, we take these blessings and Gods presence into our homes in the lovely tradition of blessed chalk. Gather as a household and pray the words on the card, mark your home, and invite God to dwell there with you this year.

This feast is one to open eyes to *who* God is, what God has *done*, and what God *is* doing among us and through us.

So, as with any trifle there is only one sensible course of action: abandon all dignity and dive in. That's exactly what Epiphany invites us to do. The wise men's perseverance. The universe-changing reality of God made human. The absurd Eucharistic generosity of Cana's wine. The promise of our Baptismal calling. The searching love of God seeking us out in Christ.

The glorious game is afoot, it's called life, and *Epiphany*: it is right before our eyes. O come, let us adore Him.