

**Sunday 8th January, 2012**

**Epiphany Sunday**

**The Feast of the Epiphany** is an ancient festival associated with the arrival of Kings to greet the baby Jesus with gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. and the Baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan at the hands of his cousin John the Baptist. It may also be associated with the first miracle of Jesus recorded in John's gospel at a wedding at Cana-in-Galilee when water was turned into wine.

Celebrated from the 4th century, this festival got a little lost during the 20th century but this has now been addressed by the process by which we celebrate festivals like Epiphany on a Sunday, rather than on a weekday, when most people will not be there to notice, let alone to celebrate.

The word **Epiphany** is Greek in origin and means **Manifestation** or showing forth of something which is somehow hidden or not quite what it seems. For Christians, it concerns our discernment that this baby, born in difficult if not strange and dangerous circumstances, is someone totally special, in fact, the Son of God.

The epiphany concerns the meaning of the gifts which reveal who Jesus is:-

**The gold** reveals him as a King, but not, as we will see later, a worldly King but a heavenly King with a Kingdom which is not of this world.

**The Frankincense** reveal him as holy, as incense was used in Temple worship and still is in Churches, the proclaim the holiness of our work in worship. The holiness of Jesus is a statement about his godly origins.

**The Myrrh** is a prediction of his death and a symbol of how this death would change everything and become the means of salvation and new life for the Christian and for the whole world.

**The Baptism of Jesus** in accompanied by an appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove which speaks words of dedication of the life of Jesus which will be authoritative and an expression of the love of God.

**Water turned into wine** is an epiphany of the transformation we see in the Incarnation of God, a manifestation of God, and also a symbol of how his life can transform our own inadequacies and failures to become godly in our own time.

Look at this painting which also appears in January Magna page 6. It is a painting by a young American artist Henry Ascensio



Epiphany  
by Henry Ascensio (b. 1972)

His website provides the following message:-

“The masterful paintings of young artist Henry Asencio are a poignant collection of contemplative works that bring forth a depth of spiritual reflection amidst the stunning figures and abstract backdrops that serve as the vehicle for his narrative. Born in times of solace when the inner voice rings clear with messages of growth, redemption and enlightenment; Asencio puts paint to canvas and allows his spirit to create and his figures to replace his thoughts and words. Deep and powerful in artistic intention, much of Asencio’s work is about contemplation and revelation of the human spirit, yet the appeal of his paintings lies in the pure visual splendour of his sensual imagery. “Epiphany” is a work that exemplifies these characteristics. Giving direction to his artistic notions and providing clarity in an ever changing world of chaos and outside influences, Asencio’s muse is poised as if to lunge forward to embrace a new conception of self-acceptance. The white sheet gently falling from the figure is used to suggest the casting off of layers of limitations and outside influences to embrace a sense of freedom and ultimately, a true joy of life and living.”

It is certainly different to the conventional concepts of Epiphany, don’t you agree? Compare it to this one by James Tissot- 1836-1902



I quite like the idea of the sheet gently falling off the body as a metaphor for casting off limitations and discovering one’s true self and a joy of living. We are, all of us, wrapped up in layers of disguise which would benefit from a series of epiphanies, revealing us the way we really are and in the process, restoring truth about ourselves to ourselves, let alone to other people. The journey of faith can often be cluttered by notions and prejudices, often picked up in childhood or younger life, but not then shed but carried with us all our life, burdening us and impeding our progress.

A former curate once produced himself as a sermon visual aid. In the sermon, he wore several layers of clothes, each one representing a stage in his life and as the sermon unravelled, he took off one layer after another, finally revealing himself in jeans and T-shirt, the real me, he said.

Good stuff.