

We're just at the beginning of Advent so it might seem a bit odd to have a centrespread on Epiphany. But, it is an important festival and one which is not always seen to be as significant now as it used to be.

On this page the Revd Canon Dr Jane Steen has written about the origins of Epiphany and how we might think about celebrating it now.

But, between Christmas and Epiphany there is another date celebrated by many in this Diocese and beyond. So on the next page you will find something about 'Watchnight' – 31 December.

Then sweeping out of Epiphany we go onto the Baptism of Christ and finally we end the Epiphany season with Candlemas: the festival which celebrates the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

The 40 days following Christmas are a significant period for us to focus on once Christmas is over.

For Advent and Christmas are not the end, but the beginning and we need to let them affect our lives and the way in which we live.

The 40 days after Christmas Day

Epiphany - the forgotten feast

The Queen of England chatted to the Prince of Bavaria – in Latin, of course. In another part of the chamber, an interpreter translated Russian into Latin, and Latin back into Russian. Behind the scenes, actors rehearsed their lines and a Fool rehearsed his final song. Perhaps he imagined a courtly bow as he sang to Her Majesty, 'But that's all one, our play is done, And we'll strive to please you every day.'

Hundreds of years later, the same play is still performed; its audience still speaks in many different languages – and, in what might seem an



The Adoration of the Magi - Andreas Mantegna c. 1495

unconnected ceremony, the Queen of England offers gold, frankincense and myrrh in her Chapel Royal.

The play, of course, is *Twelfth Night, or, What you Will* by William Shakespeare. The Queen of England who first saw it performed and (so some said at the time) simultaneously translated much of it into Latin for her international guests, was Elizabeth I. And Elizabeth II still offers gold, frankincense and myrrh in her Chapel Royal because Twelfth Night is the Feast of the Epiphany, on which the Church remembers the coming of the Magi to the

Christchild.

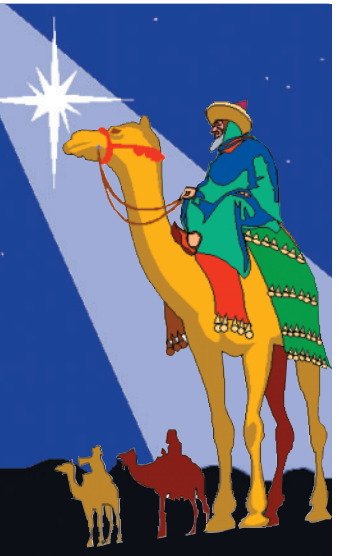
In his humble birthplace, they offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). There, they were the first to experience the revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles.

'Epiphany' comes from the Greek word for 'reveal' or 'give light to', but Epiphany is all too often a forgotten feast even though it has a long and venerable history. Its date has remained unchanged since the third century, when the Eastern Church celebrated it in honour of the Baptism of Christ. By the fourth century, Epiphany had arrived in the

West where it was separated from the Baptism of Christ; for the Western Church 6 January belonged, and belongs, to the Magi.

For many generations, Epiphany marked the end of Christmas – the Twelve Nights for which Shakespeare's play is named and which we sing about in the carol, 'On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...'

That was why the Monday after Epiphany was known as Plough Monday – and still is in some more rural dioceses than our own. It marked the beginning of the English agricultural year and was the day on which the ploughboys were supposed to be back at work. Since the enthusiasm for returning to work is rarely great, various customs developed to avoid this. They included taking the plough up and down the village street to beg for money to light the church – and having your doorstep ploughed up if you refused – as well as dancing and feasting. As for why it was Twelve Days, well,



some say that it took the Magi that long to find Jesus. Others say that Christmas used to be longer, but the landlords of old wanted to get the peasants back to work quicker. Whatever the historical reason, we might think about bringing back the Twelve Days of Christmas. Then, we could keep Advent as our season of waiting, and Christmas as Christmas, bringing it all to a glorious festival conclusion at Epiphany.

Continues overleaf



The Revd Canon Dr Jane Steen

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