

## January 3 Epiphany

They say church and politics don't mix  
Well then people haven't read their bibles  
The Nativity story proves that politics is very much  
part of God's story.

In recent days we have heard the Christmas story in  
Luke chapter 2. The story starts by telling us who is  
in power and I quote

[chapter 2] "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a  
decree that a census should be taken of the entire  
Roman world. This was the first census that took  
place while Quirinius was governor of Syria."

Luke tells us who is the political power and God uses  
this political power to ensure that his son is born in  
Davids town, Bethlehem. We know Mary and Joseph  
lived in Nazareth but here they are trekking the 60  
miles to Bethlehem, at the whim it would appear of  
the political power, but in fact as part of God's plan.

This morning we heard the story in Matthew chapter  
2 of the wisemen who rather unwisely visited The  
Palace of King Herod. Herod we know was a ruthless

politician, he had already murdered members of his  
family to be king. And now he hears of a new king  
born, and he feels threatened.

The wisemen are redirected by the priests and  
teachers of the law to go to Bethlehem David's town.

If we were to read the continuation of the chapter the  
political manoeuvring continues. Herod realises he  
has been outwitted by the wise men. In his anger he  
orders the murder of all boys under two years of age  
in Bethlehem. What a slaughter, what loss.

The holy family escape to Egypt and they stayed  
there until Herod had died and new rulers were in  
control of their homeland, so the holy family later  
return to Nazareth.

The story of Jesus is not outside of politics. Nor are  
our lives, God is in control and he can use politics to  
do his will or seek our actions to influence politics.

As we start a new year 2021, and leave the old year  
behind we have a sense of new optimism about a  
new beginning.

This new optimism includes the fact that the vaccine is available and many are receiving it.

The new year begins with Brexit is signed yet we have to see its impact on our lives.

And we are in continue Tier 4, knowing that we must be wary of the mutation of the virus.

I believe the church has a role to play in ensuring our future lives both social care and help for those less fortunate. But also to look after the spiritual life of our nation.

From what I have seen and heard I believe the church is called to once again be active, be visible and be at work spiritually in our nation.

**Prayer** undergirds all that we are and I believe we are called to pray for our leaders, for our nation and for the United Kingdom. At the start of the year to refocus our prayer life encouraged by 7 verses of scripture.

Just as the wisemen brought three gifts to the infant

Jesus so I believe that we must start this new year with three gifts. Three gifts that will transform our discipleship, and impact those around us, those three gifts are faith, hope, and love.

It is for us to embrace these qualities in new ways in 2021 so that the church is seen for what it is, a body of believers engaging in our society. Not hiding within our buildings but working for the welfare and spiritual health of the nation.

Quite often at the start of the year I present you with a bookmark or a memory verse or some such encouragement to begin the New Year.

Today I present you with a book mark of 28 Bible verses for us to go home and read and dwell on, these verses will encourage us to live out our faith, hope and love in prayer throughout the coming weeks and months.

7 is a special number in Scripture, also 7 days of the week, so I have prepared seven verses for each of those qualities. seven verses of hope, seven verses of faith, seven verse of love, and seven

encouragements to pray. It may be helpful to write them out, to meditate on them, to use them to inspire your spiritual journey this year.

Each day we can nurture our spiritual lives in our homes and encourage our spiritual Devotion so that we draw closer to God in prayer and seek what action God is calling us to.

I will email these out to those who I have email addresses for and there are a number of copies available here for you to collect before you leave today.

At the start of a new year we need to be spiritually at work in new ways.

The wisemen were diligent in seeking out the Christ child. This took them on a journey and adventure to places they did not expect to go. I believe that we too are called on a spiritual journey, to be wise people seeking God's plan for our future. Seeking God's plan for our society and nation.

As we face this New Year with optimism, Let us use this optimism as a spiritual opportunity to grow in

prayer, and in the virtues of Faith hope and love.

I conclude with those words that in 1939 King George the fifth quoted from the poem by Louise Minnie Haskins in his new year address to the commonwealth.

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.