

# St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church

Moore Street, Adelaide



An open, welcoming and inclusive community  
in the heart of the City of Adelaide

## Keeping Community Spiritual Resources & Reflections

Thursday 6 January 2022

Dear friends,

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions means it possible to again open the church for private prayer and public worship. Sunday Mass is offered weekly at 10 am, and the church will also be open on Thursday between 11.30 am and 1 pm, with the Angelus at noon and Mass at 12.10 pm.

These newsletters are intended to support the spiritual life of the community as we continue to cope with and respond to the pandemic.

### 1. From Fr Steven – The Baptism of Jesus: Aspirations

#### Aspirations

Thank you for your warm welcome last Sunday. I am delighted to be here with you. I look forward to getting to know you better in the coming months.

St Mary Magdalene is part of a living incarnational tradition, committed to initiating works of compassion and justice in the City of Adelaide. We are situated in a significant position in the city, and we have much to offer. To that end, the parish consultation, which was held in October last year, came up with some important aspirations:

- That we have the courage to be more.
- Growth in numbers.
- A sacred space in the city, for everyone.
- Creative, bold and imaginative use of our buildings.
- A more focussed concern for the poor, "poor" being interpreted very widely, and related to this, a living and lively presence in the city.

These aspirations are signs of the movement of the Spirit in our lives and our faith community. As such, the aspirations form the heart of a vision for the future. Providentially, the Gospel of Luke, which is the focus of the Gospel readings in this year of the 3 year lectionary, explores many of these themes. In terms of preaching, I will focus largely on the gospel readings.

#### Context of Luke

The gospel was composed after the fall of Jerusalem (70 CE) around 80 CE in Syrian Antioch. At this juncture, it is important to underline an important interpretive principle. That is, the four gospels are different, not only because they were written *by* different authors, but also, because they were written *for* different faith communities. Each gospel represents an example of what I am calling do-it-yourself theology.

In other words, each writer is working with a particular faith community in order to make the story of Jesus come alive for that community and their situation. The focus was not on preserving religious dogma for its own sake, but rather, it was on making the faith come alive for real communities. To this end, the writer adapts the sayings and stories of Jesus for their particular context. A good example of this is a comparison between Luke's sermon on the plain (6:17ff) and Matthew's sermon on the mount.

### **The text**

Luke's gospel is the first part of a two-part narrative known as Luke-Acts. The gospel contains iconic texts like the Magnificat and wonderful stories like the lost son. In all this, the writer is acutely aware of the abuse of power. This faith community lives in the shadow of Roman power. From the census of Augustus (Lk 2:1ff) to the trial of Jesus before Pilate (Lk 23), Rome is there.

Rome conducted a client-state system. That is, client states like Judea were afforded limited freedom, under strict conditions. Key appointments were usually Roman appointments (e.g., chief priest, chief tax collector). In this context, the early churches were politically astute. Nonetheless, this is the context where compassion was expressed generously and unconditionally. And the marginal figures are central: that is, women, Samaritans, and the poor, all matter.

### **Baptism**

Baptism, historically, had a conservative role in maintaining church order by inculcating practices of obedience. But there are other ways of reading baptism. So, in this regard, baptism is a sacrament, a symbol, an entrance rite, an act of incorporation, and a political counter-practice.

Baptism takes place in the here and now. As ritual, there is a narrative (the story of Jesus) and symbols (water, candle, holy oil). Of course, baptismal practices vary across churches. They can include adult as well as infant baptism, with immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. Moreover, there are many ways of interpreting baptism. I am using the trope of dying and rising.

Baptism is a threshold experience. It enables a crossing-over from the death of the old to the birth of the new. The symbolic action entails the use of water, which is a symbol for dying and living. As a symbol of dying, there are two aspects, mythological and existential. Mythologically, sea monsters like Behemoth came from the deep. Existentially, water is a symbol of threat. After all, we can drown in water. Water, however, is also a symbol of living. As a symbol of living, there are two aspects, theological and existential. Theologically, water is used in purification rites to *wash away* sins. Existentially, water is a source of life.

In this sense, baptism is a performative, symbolic, sacramental threshold-experience, inaugurating transformation here and now. In that context, Christian existence is inherently political. By this, I do not mean party-political, but rather, passionately concerned about issues of social justice. Baptism then raised questions about loyalties. That is, the church's practice entailed a new claim of allegiance for God, that is, in Greek, "the *basileia* of God". This can be translated as the *reign* or *kingdom* of God. The use of the term *basileia* is a signal to Rome that there is an alternative. Through baptism, the baptised belong to a new group, with new allegiances, and a different social structure.

This Sunday, I will be preaching on Luke's account of the baptism of Jesus (Lk 3:15-22). Why do you think Jesus was baptized? What does his baptism tell us about our identity and purpose?

Keep safe, keep hoping.

Steven Ogden  
Locum Priest

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## 2. Daily Prayer

Most Christian denominations have forms for prayer in the morning and the evening, and at other times of the day. Morning and Evening Prayer in the Anglican church's *A Prayer Book for Australia*, are available in either a fixed form (pages 3 – 33) or a different form for each day of the week (pages 383 – 424).

### Online Resources

There is a complete online version of Daily Prayer from *A Prayer Book for Australia* for each day available at Australian Daily Prayer <https://dailyprayer.ampers.x10.mx/>. There is also a free app for mobile devices from the App Store or Google Play.

The Church of England provides an online version of its orders for Daily Prayer at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>. This is also available as a free app. The Divine Office of the Catholic Church is available online at [www.ibreviary.com](http://www.ibreviary.com) and is also available as a free app (App Store or Google Play).

### Times of Prayer

Many people find it helpful to make a particular time daily for prayer and reflection. One option might be to join your prayer with those of the wider world at some special times during the day. While the church cannot be open every day, you may like to join the wider community in praying the Angelus at 9 am, 12 noon and 6 pm.

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## 3. Reflections and Meditations

Reflections for our two weekly newsletters will continue for the time being, and our Thursday "Spiritual Resources" newsletter will continue to be uploaded to the web page. Fr Philip Carter's meditations and spiritual reflections (in recess for January) are presented on our blog, <https://stmarymagdalenesadelaide.org/>.

To access these meditations, simply go to the blog and select the "Spirit matters" tab on the top. If you would like to receive an email update when there is a new posting on the blog, whether for a Sunday or weekday service, or for meditations and other supports for prayer, please subscribe to the blog using the box on the right-hand side of the page.

Service booklets as PDF files are still available for Sunday and weekday services on the web site and on the Parish's Facebook page.

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#### 4. In the Church's Calendar

This week the Church celebrates the Epiphany of the Lord; and the 17th century bishop William Laud.

**William Laud**, born in 1573, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633. He was the most prominent of a new generation of Churchmen who disliked many of the ritual practices which had developed during the reign of Elizabeth I, and who were bitterly opposed by the "Puritans."

Laud believed the Church of England to be in direct continuity with the medieval Church, and he stressed the unity of Church and State, exalting the role of the king as the supreme governor. He emphasized the priesthood and the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, and caused consternation by insisting on the reverencing of the Altar, returning it to its pre-Reformation position against the east wall of the church, and hedging it about with rails.



As head of the courts of High Commission and Star Chamber, Laud was abhorred for the harsh sentencing of prominent Puritans. His identification with the unpopular policies of King Charles, his support of the war against Scotland in 1640, and his efforts to make the Church independent of Parliament, made him widely disliked. He was impeached for treason by the Long Parliament in 1640, and finally beheaded on January 10, 1645.

Laud's reputation has remained controversial to this day. Honoured as a martyr and condemned as an intolerant bigot, he was compassionate in his defense of the rights of the common people against the landowners. He was honest, devout, loyal to the king and to the rights and privileges of the Church of England. He tried to reform and protect the Church in accordance with his sincere convictions. But in many ways he was out of step with the views of the majority of his countrymen, especially about the "Divine Right of Kings."

He made a noble end, praying on the scaffold: "The Lord receive my soul, and have mercy upon me, and bless this kingdom with peace and charity, that there may not be this effusion of Christian blood amongst them."

#### 5. T.S. Eliot and the Epiphany

As we approach the feast of Epiphany, it is a good time to revisit T.S. Eliot's magnificent poem *Journey of the Magi* (1935). Written as an old-age reminiscence in the voice of one of the kings, Eliot's poem traces a richly symbolic spiritual journey that foreshadows Christ's future Passion, and thus changes the pagan Magi forever. As such, the poem calls us to walk with the wise men on their pilgrimage. But if we do, Eliot warns, it will change us forever: to encounter Christ means both a death and a rebirth that will cost us everything.

With its natural imagery suggesting a spiritual coming-to-life, Eliot's poem moves symbolically from the barrenness of winter into the verdant fertility of Christ's arrival. "A cold coming we had of it," the speaker begins, "Just the worst time of the year." Travelling in "[t]he very dead of winter," the Magi frequently doubt the purpose of their pilgrimage: "With the voices singing in our ears, saying / That this was all folly." But then they enter the region of the Christ Child, and encounter a different world altogether: "at dawn we came down to a temperate valley, / Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation."

Just as he did in his 1927 masterwork *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses water as a sign of spiritual fruitfulness and life, opposed to the dead cold of winter or the dry barrenness of the desert. Here the Magi find “a running stream and a water-mill,” suggesting both living water and the fertility of grain, which would be ground in the mill. We should see, in the suggestion of grain, Eliot’s allusion to the Eucharist: the birth of Christ gives the Body of Christ to the world.

But, for Eliot, the life-giving joy of Christ’s coming cannot be separated from the foreshadowing of his terrible Passion and Death. The Magi see the silhouette of Calvary dimly promised by the “three trees on the low sky,” and at the tavern they visit they see men “dicing for pieces of silver”—an image that evokes both the casting of lots for Christ’s garment and the blood money earned by Judas’ betrayal. Even the “vine-leaves over the lintel” of the tavern suggest the Roman god Bacchus, who dies and resurrects with the seasons. All of this leads the poetic speaker, one of the Magi, to wonder: “were we led all this way for / Birth or Death?”

Indeed, the pagan Magi in the poem undergo a painful and irrevocable transformation when they encounter the Incarnate God, a permanent dying of what St. Paul called the “old man”—humanity before redemption. “I had seen birth and death,” the speaker says, “But had thought they were different; this Birth was / Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.” This death comes about through a moment of seeming understatement in the poem: when they find “the place,” the speaker tells us simply, “it was (you may say) satisfactory.” At first glance, Eliot’s choice of the word “satisfactory” might seem like faint praise for God-made-truly-human. But its Latin roots mean full completion, to “do enough.”

For Eliot here it is only the Incarnation that can ever “do enough,” that can ever fully accomplish what man needs. And nothing else will ever satisfy the Magi again: after this death, when they return to their kingdoms, they can no longer find any rest in their “summer palaces” or “silken girls bringing sherbet.” They find themselves “no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation” of the pagan world before Christ. For the three kings, after knowing the child Jesus, return home only find themselves strangers in a strange land, and find their own countrymen to be nothing but “an alien people clutching their gods.”

They have had an Epiphany, which comes from the Greek word meaning “a manifestation of the divine,” and it has, in a sense, left them dead to the world. Now the Passion of Christ—that redemptive death which brings about the New Man—has also occurred in them. Now they await the coming of the true Kingdom, dissatisfied with anything less, and the speaker can now conclude only that “I should be glad of another death.” This Epiphany, Eliot’s timeless poem calls us to make those words our own. Let us go with the Magi to meet Jesus, fully aware of the cost of it. Let us recognize that the Incarnation demands a death and offers a birth: the death of our old, barren life, and the birth of our new, fruitful life in Christ.

Dr. Kelly Scott Franklin  
Assistant Professor of English  
Hillsdale College, Michigan

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## 6. Journey of the Magi

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.  
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,

Lying down in the melting snow.  
 There were times we regretted  
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
 and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
 A hard time we had of it.  
 At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
 Sleeping in snatches,  
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
 That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
 With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,  
 And three trees on the low sky,  
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
 But there was no information, and so we continued  
 And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon  
 Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
 And I would do it again, but set down  
 This set down  
 This: were we led all that way for  
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly  
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,  
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
 With an alien people clutching their gods.  
 I should be glad of another death.

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## 7. For your prayers

*We continue to pray throughout the week for the world and the church. These intentions may be helpful in your private or family prayers.*

*For the world.* The leaders of the world as they seek to respond to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. For refugees and asylum seekers, that they may find places of safety and welcome.

*For the church.* In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, pray for the Diocese of Northern Ison (Nigeria). In our national church, pray for the Diocese of Bendigo; and within the Diocese of Adelaide, for the staff of the Synod Office.

*For our local community.* For the Collective and its ministry in the local community. For the Magdalene Centre, as it deals with the need to change the way it delivers services in order to safeguard the health of customers, staff and volunteers.

*For those in need.* For all those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, especially Paull, Valerie, Sim, Clarice, Dulcie, Jasmin, Henry, John Edwards (priest), Peter Garland (priest) and Mark.

*For those who have died.* Those who have worked and worshipped in this place before us; those who have died as a result of COVID-19 and in other tragic circumstances; those who have died recently, and those whose anniversaries of death occur at this time. ✠ Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

*For the saints.* For the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Mary Magdalene, and holy women and men of every time and place.



This newsletter will normally be distributed weekly on Thursday. Any appropriate items should be emailed to the Parish Office, [StMMAdelaide.Parish@outlook.com](mailto:StMMAdelaide.Parish@outlook.com), by Tuesday evening at 5 pm.

