



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, January 12, 2020
The First Sunday After the Epiphany

Epiphany Procession and Festal Eucharist
at 11:00 a.m.

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, *Rector*
on
Isaiah 42:1-9, Acts 10:34-43, and Matthew 3:13-17
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A new beginning.

Can you remember what were you doing on Millennium Eve, now 20 years ago? I remember what I was doing quite vividly - I was baby-sitting my children fast asleep in bed and watching the unfolding of events in the Millennium Dome in London, where we then lived. Mind you, I almost didn't see the New Year in at all since I had foolishly lit 52 candles in the sitting room and the mixture of those plus the gas fire, and very efficient sealed double-glazing almost had me asphyxiated. Opening the windows not only let in the noise of the neighbours' parties, it also let some fresh air in. But then again, that's kind of what the New Year is about...letting some oxygen back into our tired lives. Making a new start...a new beginning...and a time for the making of new year resolutions.

One of the remarkable things about Millennium Eve in London was the spiritual element to the celebrations. The deeply religious composer John Tavener composed an anthem for the celebration at the Millennium Dome. I remember the beginning and end of the piece as if it had happened yesterday. In all the fireworks, noise and outrageousness, two chorister voices quietly, yet confidently, sang these words:

Let there be respect for the earth, O Lord;
peace for your people, O Lord;
love in our lives,
delight in the good, O Lord;
forgiveness for past wrongs, O Lord;
and from now on, a new beginning, O Lord.

And from now on, a new beginning, O Lord.

The other day I was listening to messages that people had texted in to a radio station about their New Year Resolutions. People mentioned their need to lose weight; to be kinder; to go to bed earlier; to eat less chocolate...the list went on. Then, someone texted in this message. *"New Year Resolutions are the comments of weak-willed persons who know that something needs to change in their life but they simply haven't got the will power to do anything about it...so they make a New Year Resolution of it knowing that people will simply not expect them to keep it in the first place!"*

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord

This is not wishful thinking; no empty New Year resolutions – they are the first questions from the baptismal covenant - a covenant that changes lives. What did the chorister sing just a few moments ago? “As I knelt and saw the God before me I knew that his powers were also mine; to forgive, to worship, to love.”

Today, we celebrate three epiphanies in one service; the visit of the magi; the baptism of Jesus; and the first sign Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. Each reveals something of the glory of God. Each reveals a truth that God has a plan for this world in spite of what we humans are trying to do to it and to one another. Each reveals God’s presence *in* the world.

When Jesus humbled himself and entered the waters of baptism, he sanctified those waters by his very presence and he made it a vivacious sign of new beginnings.

Martin Luther King Jr., whose life and vision we shall commemorate as a nation in just over a week’s time, believed that God in Christ was calling the human race into that kind of new kind of relationship with him. In one of his sermons, he said this:

“The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”

The three epiphanies we celebrate today are examples of the breaking in of that exuberant gladness of the new age. And God is continuing to break into our deep gloom, calling us back to himself; challenging us; revealing himself to us. When Jesus ascended to the Father, what did he say to his disciples? *“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20b) He is with us not just through his Word or the sacramental life of the church; he is with us in the faces and the lives of those we live with; in those who are different from us; even in those we find difficult to be with. He is with us in one another:

“The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community.”

And how hard is that journey! And how often we falter and sometimes fall.

My friends, at the beginning of a New Year, let us decide *not* to make resolutions that we will soon forget. Instead, let us renew our baptismal covenant which has already transformed us. Let us be lights in the world; hope in the darkness; friends of the marginalized; good stewards of the earth; disciples of Jesus Christ; so that people will point to this Church and say – *there is love; there is justice; there is forgiveness; there is freedom; there is the Beloved Community.*

Let us pray.

*Let there be
respect for the earth, O Lord;
peace for your people, O Lord;
love in our lives,
delight in the good, O Lord;
forgiveness for past wrongs, O Lord;
and from now on, a new beginning, O Lord. Amen.*