

## Sermon for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany Year C

Readings:

[Isaiah 49: 1-7](#)

[1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

[John 1: 29-42](#)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

Well here we are on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Epiphany season, which David started off a couple of weeks ago by setting us, with the help of Psalm 8, in our place within the Universe ( well at least in relation to our Galaxy – the BIG ( visible) universe – probably more than ten billion years old and containing 100 billion galaxies—is another matter ). We are at once insignificant and also unique, as revealed in our fingerprints ( I recall mentioning in a sermon some years ago a person with a very different take on Scripture to mine who disagreed with me over what we could know about whether there was other life in the Universe. I said the Bible didn't give us much to go on, she said that if there were life elsewhere, God would have told us in the Bible) .David got the numbers right as well as what a Light Year is ( if you'll forgive a personal aside here, one of the best ways of getting a retired science teacher's back up is to get the science wrong !) And Liz Haskins answered David's Question 'What's the Biblical evidence for claiming that one of the wise was a woman?' by replying 'They asked for Directions' . And we're going to end our service by singing ' We Three Kings' ( a Hymn heavy with meaning at this time, for probably they originated from what is present day Iran, from a very different cultural and religious background – what sort of welcome would they be given today? ). And that allows me to ask you a question , what's the Scriptural evidence for claiming that there were three of them? ( the answer is none, we assume it from the 3 Gifts they are recorded as offering!) And they of course have nothing to do with Leyton Orient, a team which is I believe in the Second Division and therefore not to be mentioned in the same breath as our Vicar's team And that Star – it's a bit of a Mystery. I remember a time when, it seemed, almost every Christmas and New Year edition of New Scientist had to have an article by someone (often an astronomer or astrophysicist) with a different take on what the star might have been - none of their ideas seemed to fit the evidence perfectly, so is it a myth? Who Knows!

So what do our readings give us today – well to take them in order as read to us by Gill,

we begin with Isaiah – most scholars now accept that the book was written in 3 parts Verses 1-39 being 1<sup>st</sup>, then 40-55 and finally 56-66 they are separated by a change in style and context and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah was perhaps written in Exile in Babylon.

2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah contains this Servant Song, the second. It's been said by some that if you lift the servant songs out of the text, what remains reads better, and that the Songs have a meaning of their own – is Jesus the servant here? Mining the scriptures for 'proof texts' isn't a new idea, so move here with caution, perhaps asking yourself 'did the writer understand that what he (it usually was a he) was writing could or would be interpreted in this way?' as you read this (or any other!) passage.

The writer speaks of a global – or is it perhaps universal? – mission to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Simeon in a way quotes this in Luke 2:32 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel* – you may recognise this as the Nunc Dimittis

And then we have the bit from Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Church at Corinth – It's important to realise that this is only the opening of the letter with its almost standard introduction of greeting and thanksgiving. Paul emphasises his call to be an Apostle and thus one who writes with Authority – quite who Sosthenes is is open to discussion – maybe he was the scribe who wrote down the letter at Paul's dictation. An *Amanuensis* in other words<sup>1</sup> – a word heavy with meaning for me from the time I was an Examinations Officer in a Secondary School and had to arrange *Amanuenses* for students who were in some way incapacitated - why did Paul need one? That's a question you can research for yourself. And he writes to those 'set apart' – not specifically 'Holy' for he has more to say on that subject later in the letter, for the Corinthian Church was not without its problems, it would seem

And he mentions the breadth of our invitation to call on the Lord's name 'in every place'. Again I sometimes feel our earthbound vision is too narrow, too confined, when if God is truly God, the Universe must be God's, all that is, seen and unseen (as the Creed puts it) I said in a sermon long ago that, for me, one of the signs of ageing was that you have a head full of quotations and you can't track down where you got them from, so you begin to think that it's wishful thinking, that you've invented them. If that were true back then how much more is it true now! In this case I used to think it was the late Bp Hugh Montefiore who said 'I believe that if somewhere in the universe there are little green men (the

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1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanuensis>

Politically Correct person deep within me would, of course, think about changing that.) in need of salvation, God would not hesitate to take little green flesh that it might be accomplished' but it seems I am wrong in my attribution so if anyone recognises the quote and can give me it's source, I'd be grateful!

And finally our Gospel Reading

The first part is a Testimony by John the Baptist that Jesus is the Real Thing, the Lamb of God. As an image, this has produced much art.<sup>2</sup> some of it heavily stylised , some, like the one on our pew slip more realistic perhaps upsettingly so– I can't presume to know whether or not you find such images helpful or disturbing, but they have a long history



Agnus Dei by Francisco de Zurbarán 1598-1664

Who he said it to ( other than himself) isn't part of the record. If the phrase '*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*' seems familiar to you, you can reflect on it when we sing it just before making our Communion. And you may find the imagery resonates with you in other places, especially in the Book of Revelation, where it is often found associated with Lion imagery – there is much written about it.<sup>3</sup> And why do most observant Jews not accept that Jesus is the Messiah, was it, as seems possible, because Jesus did not fulfil Jewish expectations of the Messiah, because Christians have 'moved the goalposts'?

And what of Messianic Jews<sup>4</sup> those who believe that the Messiah has come, but may still keep the Mosaic Law – the situation is complex to say the least– some years ago there

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2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb\\_of\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb_of_God)

3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb\\_of\\_God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamb_of_God)

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messianic\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messianic_Judaism)

was a 'bit of a row' over some people telling a group of Messianic Jews that there was a welcome for them in the State of Israel, a message which was somewhat at variance with the official line of the Israeli Government.

It's in the second part that I feel a twinge of questioning creep in. One wonders why John sent his 2 followers to become disciples of Jesus? Did John not feel a bit of regret at losing a couple of his Disciples to another? That would perhaps be a human response, and, I suspect, how I might have reacted— having presumably invested time and energy in discipling them, to lose them must have been quite a blow (Acts 19 recounts the meeting by Paul of some disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus who had not been baptised with the Spirit, but with John's Baptism, so it sounds as if there were people around who had only met and been baptised by John and knew nothing of Jesus)

So whatever you make ( or not) of images around the idea of Jesus as the Lamb of God, may I wish you a good and profitable time of considering what images of Jesus you find helpful, as well-as the rest of the questions I've, as seems to be my habit, left you with.