

Rev Tim Perkins
Jan 6th 2022

“Where is the One who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (Matt. 2: 2)

Happy New Year! Despite the undoubted chaos of last-minute changes to Christmas and New Year plans that many people have experienced, I do hope and pray you discovered afresh something of the light and love of Christ shining in the darkness of our world throughout the Season of Christmas!

The words quoted above are spoken by the Magi to the people of Jerusalem as they arrived in their search for a new-born King. It is a story that we particularly remember today, on what we call “Epiphany.” An epiphany is a revelation or manifestation of the Divine. There are several epiphanies recorded in the New Testament. In the Eastern Church, “Epiphany” is associated as much with the story of the Baptism of Jesus and the voice of God declaring, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,” as it is with the story of the Magi, which celebrates the revelation of God in Christ to the Gentile world, not just to the Jewish nation. The transfiguration is also often referred to as an epiphany event.

Such epiphanies are important for us to reflect upon because they remind us that God is present and active in the ordinary, everyday life of the world, not sitting someone on a cloud twiddling his thumbs, aloof and separated from creation. As such, they tie in with the greatest “epiphany” of all, which we have recently celebrated – the incarnation of God in human flesh in the babe of Bethlehem. As I think about these great stories of our faith, I find myself asking how can I experience afresh the incarnation of God in my life and how can I help root the incarnation of Christ in the communities that I live and work in?

These are questions which, I think, lie at the heart of the “Flourish” initiative which we are embarking upon across the Circuit over the coming weeks. For our own faith to flourish we need to be inspired not just by the stories of such epiphanies but by our own experience of the epiphany of God in our lives. What have been your experiences of God revealing herself to you? If we have eyes to see, we will see that God is constantly revealing Godself to us through manifold ways and means of grace: through prayer, through scripture, through worship, through the world around us, through the people we encounter, through the silence and stillness of time alone with God, through the generosity and service we offer to others and receive from others. And as we experience these simple epiphanies so something of the Divine life and light which they reveal, rubs off on us and our characters experience a degree of greater transformation into the likeness of Christ.

But God is also at work in our communities and our world, sometimes with or through our own actions, sometimes ahead of us calling us to join in. I wonder how we can participate in rooting the incarnation or revelation of God in Christ, in our local communities? The work of our Circuit CAP Debt Centre is a tangible example of the light of Christ being revealed in the midst of the darkness of debt. The reverse Advent Calendar appeal organised by the team at Wharfedale Refugee Response is a tangible expression of the light of God made manifest in the darkness experienced by so many refugees, asylum seekers and homeless people. I am sure there are countless other expressions of the light of God at work across our circuit but it is all too easy for us to leave it to others who have more time, gifts or resources. I want to ask you, how can

you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to enable the light of God's love to be seen through you in your: home, school, university, work-place, social club, gym, craft-group etc?

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to his followers: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5: 14-16)

How can your life serve as an epiphany of the light and love of God to those you encounter each day? If we are encountering God regularly and experiencing the transformation of our characters as a result, then God's light and love will radiate out through our transformed characters – we will reveal love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. So, it is about who we are becoming in Christ. But who we are becoming must necessarily work itself out though all we are doing.

I do hope and pray that our "Flourish" initiative will inspire you to be an epiphany for others – a revelation of the Divine to the world around you. As well as the themes being explored in worship, you should also shortly receive both a postcard and a simple journal to help you engage with the themes. There are resources on our Circuit website: www.wandamethodists.org.uk and there are ideas for housegroup sessions as well.

"Flourish" is something we hope that each and everyone of us associated with the churches of the Wharfedale & Aireborough Methodist Circuit will find a way to participate in. For many of us that will be through attending in-person services at church. But we are conscious that, as yet, many people still do not feel confident attending worship. Some of you will have internet access. For you we offer the recorded services that will be taking place at Burley in Wharfedale and which will be uploaded to Burley's Youtube Channel following the service. These can be accessed online either through Burley's website: www.burleymethodist.org and then following the Youtube link, or directly on Youtube using this link: [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](#) or going to Youtube and searching "Burley Methodist Church Online."

For those without internet access we are aiming to produce a full-script service sheet for distribution during the week following each service. It will be based on one of the services from around the Circuit. Hopefully, local churches will have in place distribution systems and processes to ensure that nobody misses out. If you would like to receive the service sheet please contact your pastoral visitor, Church Pastoral Secretary or Minister and they will do their best to make sure you receive it.

"Flourish" gives us an opportunity at the start of a New Year to reflect on what has changed throughout the course of the pandemic and to mark a line in the sand and say "we will not go backwards. We will only go forwards into the light and love of the kingdom of God!"

I would like to finish by offering to you a poem which will be part of the resources for our Flourish programme, titled "Fit me in somewhere."

Fit me in somewhere
in this giant jigsaw, God,
somewhere in this work of art
you're working,
Select a space my shape can fill
and with a puzzle maker's skill
let my contours find their fit without contortion.

Teach me which patch I am, God,

in the cosmic quilt you're quilting.
Show me where my square of selfhood is of use.
Let the colourful complexities
of the pattern that is me
find their purpose in the placement that you choose.

Show me my position, God,
in this group photograph.
Stand me where you want me to stand.
Put me next to whom you will.
Make me stand, for good or ill,
precisely in the place your plan demands.

Tell me what I am, God,
in this body you are building:
a tongue to taste,
a nerve to serve,
an ear to hear.
Give me grace
to not be, gracefully,
the parts I am not called to be
and to play with elegance
the roles I'm given.

Fit me in somewhere
in this giant jigsaw, God,
somewhere in this work of art you're working.
Weave your wondrous tapestry
until the twisted, tangled threads of me,
surrendered to your artistry,
form an image that is beautiful to see.

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Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Circuit News

Lay Employment Panel

As part of our ongoing commitment to enable all our Circuit employees to flourish in their roles we are seeking to establish a "Lay Employment Panel" as a matter of urgency. This panel will have oversight of all lay appointment processes across the circuit, from developing appointments for the circuit to reviewing and approving appointments for local churches and overseeing the ongoing development and wellbeing of our lay staff. If this is something which you feel you have enthusiasm for and gifts in then I would love to hear from you. It is a matter of urgency because we need to have this team in place before we can progress the plans we have for our Circuit Lay Support Staff Team or agree any new local church appointments.

Circuit Teams

The pandemic has made it very difficult for us to implement some of the ideas from the Circuit's "Planning for Growth" strategy but our intention in the New Year is to focus on developing the work of our Circuit Teams to enable the flourishing of our work in the following areas:

- Children, Young People and Schools Team
- Learning and Development Team
- Mission and Evangelism Team

The aims of these teams are to bring together enthusiastic and gifted people in these areas of work to develop circuit-wide opportunities for growth and to offer expertise and resources to individual congregations who might be seeking to focus on a specific project or area. The nature of our Methodist structure is such that our Churches cannot flourish without the support and input of the Circuit but neither can the Circuit flourish without the support and input of the local Churches. It is all too easy for us to focus on our own small part of the picture but if the picture is to become clear we do need people to serve at a Circuit level not just a local one. Again, if this appeals to you, please contact me at the earliest opportunity.

Circuit Secretary (volunteer)

In order to provide a clearer missional focus for some of Circuit Lay Support roles we are actively seeking a volunteer with secretarial skills to act as our Circuit Secretary. The role would be to provide secretarial support to our Circuit Meeting, Circuit Leadership Team and Circuit Invitations Committee. It will involve attendance at roughly 12 meetings a year plus the work to distribute papers in advance and to take minutes. If you feel you could help in this way please contact either Rev Tim or Mike Fawcett.