

One of the things that gets teachers out of bed in the morning is the joy of seeing a pupil grasp something new and enter into a whole new world because of it. Those 'aha' moments are precious and a privilege to be part of. They constitute a kind of Epiphany. One moment you don't get it then suddenly there is a revelation and you do. Things are never the same again. Educationalists talk about 'threshold concepts' which are pieces of knowledge that we need in order to make progress in a subject. A simple example is the principle of long division in mathematics. Until the pupil has grasped this he or she will remain stuck where they are. All this makes the idea of Epiphany seem sudden and immediate. The western Christian calendar marks Epiphany, the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus. God revealed himself in Jesus to the nations as well as to his own people. More recently the emphasis in the Eastern Church has found its way into Common

# THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

By the Rev Dr Liz Hoare

Worship and so the baptism of Jesus and the turning of water into wine are included in Epiphany as further moments of revelation.

These additions remind us that revelation isn't always sudden. But in fact the visit of the wise men should also make us pause. Their journey to their destination was a long one; some scholars reckon it could have taken two years. We know so little about them except for the exotic gifts that they brought. How many times did they wish they hadn't set out and left the comfort of home? Did they doubt their original conviction that the star would lead

them to a king? But they kept on going and in the end their dogged determination was rewarded.

Threshold concepts have three essential outcomes. They are irreversible, transformative and integrative. Whether our personal Epiphanies regarding faith in the Lord Jesus are sudden and immediate or slow and drawn out in time they share with threshold concepts those same three outcomes. First there is no going back. Conversion through the life, death and resurrection of Christ means that there is a before and an after: 'I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.'

The cross in a human life is irreversible, though it may take us years to get there. Then it is transformative. Things look different through the lens of Calvary. The whole realm of existence is transformed in the light of the Gospel: past, present and future. Thirdly, the cross makes sense of everything. There isn't any part of us that is unaffected, though again it may take long years of discipleship to see and understand the implications for every part of our lives. This may include other, smaller epiphanies along the way: moments when we see something new about our life in Christ that opens a window of opportunity or growth or surrender. And like the wise men, the only response is to bow down and worship.

*The Rev Dr Liz Hoare (née Culling) is tutor in prayer, spirituality and mission at Wycliffe Hall*

## SUNDAY SERVICE

Sunday Readings for 29 January 2012

Epiphany 4 - Year B

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Revelation 12:1-5a

Mark 1:21-28

Moses is the archetype of all the prophets who are to follow him, called to serve God in the most direct fashion as the one who speaks in the name of the Lord, in the words of the Lord. It is a concession to our mortal nature, which is too frail to bear directly the holiness of God himself, his presence or his voice. The prophet is an intermediary, in an unenviable position of terrifying responsibility, for he must convey the words of the Lord with absolute faithfulness and clarity, for fear of the Lord. It is not for the prophet to add his own interpretation, or to engage in syncretism of any kind, knowing that this will bring upon him the punishment of the Lord. Similarly, he knows that prophecy is not always well received by those who hear it, for it is often spoken to challenge injustice or unfaithfulness on the part of the rulers of the people, recalling them to the Law and to the judgement of God himself. The messenger is all too often harshly treated by the recipients of the message that is delivered.

A greater prophet than Moses is to come, anointed by God to lead the battle against the powers that are opposed to his just and gentle rule, and finally to defeat sin and death itself. The spiritual conflict that has been waged from the beginning will be brought to its conclusion in the victory of God over Evil, who will not be cast down without a struggle on a cosmic scale, but his defeat is assured at the hands of the Lord. Jesus is born into a world which is hostile to his presence, although all of creation came into being through him; and evil manifests himself immediately with Herod's paranoid massacre of male children in the region, seeking to wipe out any challenge to his throne. The attempt to destroy Jesus at birth fails, as Mary and Jesus are taken by Joseph to a place of safety as refugees in Egypt. Later, in the desert, a sinister strategy is played out in an effort to render his ministry stillborn, by tempting Jesus to disobey his Father's calling. But Jesus is far more than a prophet, and it is by his obedience that he finally triumphs on the Cross and is raised from the dead having broken all the powers of darkness.

Prophets are mortals like everyone else, and there were many who failed both God and their calling. In the same way the official teachers of the Law were subject to the temptations of office and status and the worldly privileges that they enjoyed. The contrast between Jesus and the complacency of the contemporary authorities could not be more apparent, for they had become faithless and hidebound by their own traditions. But when Jesus spoke, his words were fresh and compelling, illuminating the familiar words and texts with new meaning and colour, so that all who heard him realised that he spoke with authority, not at second hand but in his own person. Here, in the synagogue at Capernaum, stood the word of God, challenging its congregation to repentance and a new life of faith. Even the unclean spirits cried out in fear, recognising that the time of judgement had come upon them, as Jesus cleansed those who had fallen into the power of the evil one, and restored them to wholeness and holiness of being. The word is in our midst, too, and we should listen to him, however unpopular it makes us with the rulers of our age, for God has triumphantly vindicated him in the new life of the resurrection, and the victory belongs to Jesus.

*The Reverend Stephen Trott*

## HYMN SELECTION

### Hymns for Epiphany 4

Great is thy faithfulness  
Firmly I believe and truly  
I bind unto myself today  
Be thou my vision  
Give thanks with a grateful heart  
I know that my redeemer lives  
Christ triumphant ever reigning  
We are marching  
Restore, O Lord  
Lord, for the years  
Thine be the glory

# Gearing up for the Olympic opportunities

Bob Mayo

Like any hard-pressed, head-frazzled, body-tired church leader, I have to decide what to make of the missional opportunities offered by the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Do the Games offer a once in a lifetime opportunity or are they a hassle that I can do without? What does the fact that competitors from 205 countries are converging on the UK have to do with me as a beleaguered parish priest?

Organizing a barbeque to coincide with the Opening Ceremony seems to be an obvious base line activity. People will want to watch the ceremony in the company of others and so there will never be a better time to gather people from across the community. We are planning an inter-generational gathering to bring together young people with older people whose memory of the Olympics comes from before the War. I am one of the people due to carry the Olympic flame and so we will be able to maximize the feel good factor surrounding the event.

The opening ceremony will take place at 20.12pm and so if we invite people to come up a couple of hours beforehand, put on the theme music from *Chariots of Fire*, organize some races for the children and get everyone watching the opening of the Games together we will be memory-making for the children and community-building for the adults. The Bible (2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1-3) talks about the Christian life being a race of faith and so we can talk about how all Christians are spiritual medal winners and be Gospel sharp and community friendly.

This still leaves open the question of what might capture the imagination of young people, in particular those who might otherwise feel disenfranchised from the Games, without tickets of their own. It is to this end that I have been working with Rev Ruth Bushyager who, in the name of the London Diocese, is working to gather 2,012 young people in St Paul's Cathedral to be commissioned by the Bishop of London as Ambassadors for Christ in the Olympic year and beyond ([www.the2012.org.uk](http://www.the2012.org.uk)).

"The2012" initiative is designed to envision and equip those in the 13-35 age range to 'know, live and share' the Gospel. This is happening through an online Facebook community and Twitter stream, bespoke training events and discipleship courses. After the commissioning at St Paul's there is the opportunity for young

people to be involved with – and to take the lead in – a variety of mission and service projects surrounding the Games.

What has become evident in the planning for the event is that while churches have a lot of questions, the young people generally want to be left free to arrange things for themselves. The clergy want to know what a pan-parish initiative might mean to them. What will be the work involved for them? Will it leave young people all fired up with nowhere to go and potentially dissatisfied with the parish church to which they will return? There are three simple premises behind the initiative which mirror (Collins-Mayo et al 2010) research into Generation Y and as such will have echoes with other places in the country.

Young people are not hostile to the church but are willing to engage with authenticity on any level. The Olympics are the ultimate example of authenticity and hence offer the church opportunities for connections to be made with the emerging generation of young people. Young people are not a 'missing generation' but are just in a different place from where we expect them to be.

Young people do not just want events to be organized for them but want the platform to do so for themselves... Our Generation Y research identified how young people have a coherent, confident yet also conventional way of looking at the world.

Ruth has found herself staggered by some of the young people she has met. This leaves Church leaders, such as myself, with a situation that presents us with both an invitation and a challenge. We have to have the security to release young people into real ministry – not just to delegate tasks, but also to give away real responsibility and authority.

Generation Y young people want a church in which different types of churchmanship are willing to work together in partnership; now is the time for coalition Christianity. 2012 is the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives and the quarry from which ideas of co-operative working are drawn come from the best traditions of our Christian faith - it is a dog help dog world.

Follow Bob Mayo on twitter @RevBob-Mayo. His most recent book is *The Faith of Generation Y* (2010, co-authored with Sylvie Collins-Mayo & Sally Nash).

Ruth Bushyager is the Coordinator for the 2012 initiative and can be contacted on [ruth.bushyager@london.anglican.org](mailto:ruth.bushyager@london.anglican.org)