

Risen



Christ

The Epiphany of the Lord

3 & 4 January 2026 - Year A

The Catholic Communities of Our Lady Help of Christians, Eltham & St Francis Xavier, Montmorency



We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him, 'for that is what the prophet wrote:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way.

Reflection - Break Open the Word 2026:

Camels and kings often appear on Christmas cards. Today the figures of the wise men are placed in the Christmas crib. The gospel story says nothing about camels, does not call them kings and does not tell us how many there were (only that they brought three gifts). Read the story with fresh eyes.

It is an inspiring story of those who seek the truth, often despite considerable hardship. It is an exciting story of naivety and cunning, of deception and betrayal. It is a delightful and joyous story of a mission accomplished. It culminates with revelation, acknowledgement and adoration.

Readers should drop their voice at the words of the prophet so that it is easily heard as a quotation. The response of Herod: *let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage* should be dripping with irony. The reader should help the assembly to accompany the Magi and discover the Christ child with a sense of wonder.

In Holy Stillness - Joseph's Faith

As the story of Jesus' birth begins to unfold in Matthew's Gospel, the focus shifts quietly to Joseph, a man whose response to a dream would change the course of salvation history.

Joseph is described as a "righteous man" (Matthew 1:19). He is faithful to the law, guided by conscience, and filled with compassion. When he learns that Mary is pregnant, all that he thought he knew about Mary, God's will and righteousness is thrown into question. So, he began to make plans to separate from her quietly.

But, in the stillness of the night, Joseph dreamed. An angel spoke, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

This is more than an announcement; it is a commission. The dream doesn't provide all the answers, nor does it erase the law's requirements or remove the scandal. Joseph was placed in a difficult position. The dream revealed something deeper: that God was at work, and Joseph was invited into this mystery.

Joseph's response is immediate and wholehearted. He wakes and obeys. He takes Mary into his home and names the child Jesus. In doing so, Joseph gives the son of God a name, a place and a future.

This dream asks Joseph to surrender not just his plans but also his understanding of what righteousness looks like. It calls him to move from fear to trust, from law to mercy and from certainty to faith.

Joseph shows us what it truly means to be faithful. Deeply rooted in tradition, yet open to the mystery of God breaking through it, Joseph reminds us that holiness is often quiet, courageous, and trusting amid uncertainty. What God asks is simple, though not easy: to rise, and to say yes. In his silent obedience, Joseph becomes a model of Advent faith, a faith that doesn't always see everything clearly, but one that chooses to walk with God anyway.



*This parish has a commitment to ensuring the safety of children and vulnerable people in our community.
We support the recommendations of the Royal Commission into institutional abuse and pray for all the survivors.*



THE CASE FOR MORAL RENEWAL

The international structures supporting European security are starting to collapse. This presents momentous challenges. With France and Britain, the two strongest military powers in Europe, leading the way since the end of the Second World War the continent allowed itself to become increasingly dependent on the United States in matters of defence. Until recently the US liked this arrangement, but under President Donald Trump it is giving notice that it is coming to an end. Europe has to learn to stand on its own feet. This is true with regard not just to Ukraine but to everything else. Those in charge in Washington want to return the US to a stance of aggressive isolationism. They seem no longer convinced that Europe is worth fighting for. There is a conviction of European decadence, of a continent losing its character, even the very idea of European civilization being lost.

The new statement of the United States' national security strategy declares that Europe's economic decline "is eclipsed by the real and more stark prospect of civilizational erasure. The larger issues facing Europe include activities of the European Union and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty, migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition, cratering birthrates, the loss of national identities and self-confidence. Should present trends continue, the continent will be unrecognizable in 20 years or less."

This is not just Trumpian stupidity and grandiosity, for it aligns with a confused sense of decline and self-doubt among some Europeans themselves. In country after country the political pendulum is swinging to the right, even the extreme right. When there is hardship and fear unscrupulous politicians and some of the media will try to direct people's anger away from the real causes of growing economic inequality towards convenient scapegoats, two of which readily present themselves. One is immigration, especially Muslim immigration - present by some as importing into Britain and elsewhere in Europe an alien and incompatible ideology; the second is what is scoffed at as "wokery" or "political correctness". This is the claim that liberal and progressive-minded elites in the government, the media, academia and the professions have allowed themselves to be dominated by identity politics to the extent that an ideology of absolute personal autonomy trumps social and collective responsibility, with the supposition that all belief systems and the cultures that embed them are of equal weight and value.

Criticism from the far right, and their fellow travelers, connect this to the decline in Christian beliefs. The reform party, and to the right of that the movement led by Tommy Robinson, see what they imagine to be "Christianity" as a bulwark against Islam and "woke-ism". They sing Christmas carols not because they believe God became incarnate in a baby but because they think Muslims - who revere him as a prophet - know nothing of Jesus.

This requisitioning of Christians observances for quasi-racist purposes is a serious challenge to the major Churches. But their answer to it must consider the context in which it has arisen. The case against 'liberalism' must be addressed. It would be a mistake to confuse the "renewal of Christianity" with a return to pre-modern,

socially conservative Britain. That would not be a formula for a social renewal based on gospel values. Many of the changes that were seen in the socially progressive and "permissive" liberal societies that emerged in the West in the post-war years were rooted in the Christian call to protect the weakest and defend the equal dignity of every human being. While stable traditional marriages provided a secure framework for children, the stigmatization of the divorced and the social ostracism of unmarried mothers led to misery for some of the most vulnerable. The criminalisation of gay relationships was a major injustice. White supremacy was not far below the surface; violent racism was almost institutionalized in places like the army and police. Women suffered from stereotyping and systematic inequality. To sacrifice those gains in the name of post-liberalism would be a disastrous leap backwards.

Nevertheless, there is an urgent case for Christian and moral renewal to revive the social capital that belief networks provided and to restore the unifying idea that has somehow gone missing from British national identity. It used to be "throne and altar" - the pillars of the established Anglican Church that was the default religion of the English, with national equivalents in other parts of the United Kingdom. The absolutist belief in the autonomy of the individual that seeks to replace it must be resisted. A healthy secularism - that encourages a conversation about the good society among people of different faith groups and people of no religious faith - would serve the national character better. The renewed commitment needed now is an ethical one. It is contained in the principle of the common good foundational to Catholic Social Teaching but dating from pre-Christian Greek philosophy Aristotle in particular, and found running through the social teaching of Islam, Judaism and all the great world faiths.

It is contained in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which not only answers the question "Who is my neighbour?" but also, "What is my duty to him or her?" It was preached by Jesus to an orthodox Jewish audience who accepted its conclusion, so it may truly be said to be at the heart of Judaeo-Christian morality. The Good Samaritan was a stranger, even an outcast but he recognised his neighbour by the fact that he was in dire need. That is the principle on which the National Health Service and the welfare state were founded. It is a profoundly Christian statement by the British people that "the sick and poor are our neighbours to be loved as we love ourselves". It can be found in the state education system, where the burdens of educating the next generation is spread across the whole society. All three of these great instruments of solidarity date from a time when the assumption that Britain was a Christian country was automatic.

That basic Christian identity does not need reinventing, it needs rediscovering. British Muslims are among those most naturally sympathetic to that rediscovery. It implies radical equality among people regardless of race, ethnicity, legal status, nationality and so on, and based solely on need. It is also incompatible with the "no recourse to public funds" rule for migrants and asylum seekers that has created a layer of second-class citizens in British society, a proxy for racial discrimination. Nothing would further distance Britain from the sort of society Donald Trump would like to turn Britain into, that repealing it. Far more effective than merely singing carols.