

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world... I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

In nomine &c †

**A new star has appeared in the sky they say and so a new history must be written, new calendars created, a new future mapped out. "This revolution is a blazing comet destined to inspire with fresh life and vigour, or to scorch up and destroy..." Thomas Malthus 1798**

**They are tricky things, calendars. You may have received one in your *stocking* at Christmas, or packed one away with your cards & decorations on Twelfth Night, but in either case you would have been holding in your hands: an almanac, not just of the phases of the moon, but of the tides and affairs of men - a compendium of (the oldest) human aspirations and frustrations. Because along with painting, and pets, the calendar is about as primary an expression of human culture as there is.**

**And, , notwithstanding the fact that almost *all* the people or regimes who have *tried* to bend the world to *fit* a calendar of their making, have tended to be monsters, there are obvious and apparently universal attractions to *having* a way of dividing and marking time that is neat, regular and simple. But time and space being what they are - it is also universally apparent - that no such system can exist without doing some kind of violence to the reality being represented. Cutting a bit off here, squeezing a bit out there. Ignoring this aspect, privileging that. The trouble is that to make sense of our world and make our way in it, we have *always* needed points of reference beyond it - celestial spheres and stars to guide us - but inconveniently all that *is* beyond it is too vast and complex to map neatly onto our dusty daily details.**

**And if that is the case for the merely cosmic, what chance have we of finding an adequate template for the infinite and the invisible?**

**So even as secular calendars struggle to square the circles of sun and moon, the Church's calendar or calendars are charged with the impossible burden of reflecting and containing - *not* the movements of the heavens from the earth, but the coming to Earth of Heaven and the gathering of time into eternity. And, as a result, it shouldn't be a surprise, if they bulge and fray a bit along the seams...**

**Which brings us, as always, to our lectionaries and timetables of feasts and New Moons - and to this day in the Calendar in particular.**

**We spend an inordinate amount of time here banging on about the calendar of Sunday lessons and Collects which we follow. The Prayer Book One Year lectionary that reflects so closely, and with such continuity, the oldest common lectionary of the Western Church. The pattern of scriptural passages and prayers that has been so carefully crafted to lead us ever further into the Holy Mysteries of the Incarnation, and thereby into the Triune Life of God. We extol it, and expound it, and use it as the framework for the process of discipleship that we are embarked upon together in this place...**

**So it might come as a shock to hear me say, that today is one of the days which that calendar got wrong. In my humble opinion.**

**Or rather - today happens to be the day that the composers of the Prayer Book misplaced when they were piecing the ancient calendar back together after their minor amendments. Perhaps two cards were stuck together, or one day fell down the back of the editors table, but *however it happened*, today, and it's Gospel text with which I began...got...lost. This day would have been, should have been, *had been* in the Sarum rite and what preceded it, Sunday in the Octave of Epiphany, followed *next* Sunday by the First Sunday after Epiphany and the Gospel of the Child Jesus in the Temple. But since the end of the 17th Century the Sunday in the Octave of Epiphany has disappeared, and in places like this that still follow that calendar we have jumped straight to Epiphany I.**

**Now as I say all calendars are tricky things. And crafting an astrolabe to trace Eternity's wheels within wheels as they intersect with our rolling spheres is inevitably an impossible task, so it is perfectly reasonable to deliberately or accidentally lose an hour here or add a day here. And what is more the Feast of the Epiphany is one of a number of Christian days, as you know, that is actually *eight* days. Or better, that is actually *all* of the days and one more besides. Indeed this day, we are still in the midst of 6 days after it dawned, is, at one and the same time, the feast of the visit of the Magi, (an inseparable part of Christmas), the Baptism of the adult Christ in the Jordan which it was the ancient custom to mark tomorrow on the Octave of Epiphany, as well as on this vanished Sunday in the Octave, and the wedding we will hear of next Sunday - though it would have been two Sundays time if we hadn't lost one- that marriage at Cana which prefigures the banquet at the end of time - the feast of a change as elemental as it is everlasting... So it is hard to be unduly critical of any failure to adequately pin down this time travelling feast.**

**But today, in Pusey House's attempt at a calendar, as we begin a new secular year, at the threshold of a new university term, even as we have heard the Gospel in which Jesus' stands on the cusp of his adult life, it seems appropriate to wind the clock back, and to reinstate the missing Sunday with its celebration of the Baptism so that as we set off into the times and seasons of this year we can focus our thoughts on the starting point of all our Baptisms, which we remember bodily every time we cross the threshold of this place, and which the church wanted to recall as beginning of our journey into the life of the Trinity through the person of the Son.**

**So with our Orthodox brethren let us celebrate Epiphany together by plunging into the baptismal waters... and finding ourselves in the middle of the Jordan - not just a liminal space as the waters always are - but the boundary between wilderness and promised land in the first Joshua's story, between this world and the heavenly realms in Elijah and Elisha's story - and, along with the Temple Veil that hangs in the background of our earlier Gospel text, perhaps the consummate threshold in the whole story of God's people - the brim of the old dispensation, and the brink of the new...**

**In fact on reflection if there was any one moment we might reasonably expect to find overflowing the margins of our calendars and calculations, and interrupting the ceaseless stream of time...**

**It would be the Baptism of Jesus - the event starred by all the Gospel writers - that explicitly connects the beginning of history with its end, this epiphany when Heaven is opened, this supernova where in brilliant light a new reality does explode into our firmament pulling everything into its orbit and creating a horizon which we are drawn**

**to approach, even to cross, but which we cannot measure with our conventional rules!...and which observed from a distance can only confound and puzzle...**

**Because, as with the holy mysteries of water into wine, and light to the nations - The Baptism of The Lord is Epiphany, it is the New Star in the Sky, the sign of a new world.**

**It is the sign of a new Israel - the Jewish rite of baptism by which the nations were converted to Yahweh now demanded of the Israelites themselves and fulfilled by their messiah...**

**It is the sign of a new promise and a new Kingdom - as the Ark once stood with Joshua on the dry bed of the Jordan to lead the people into the land of milk and honey, now the Ark stands in Jesus on that same ground, to open the way for all nations to the new promised land...**

**It is the sign of a new law, as the old lectionaries spell out in their epiphanytide readings from the sermon on the mount and our Gospel today makes explicit - not just a new template for righteousness, but a new temple - a new rite - a new way for all things to be reconciled to God.**

**Which is why John says in this crucial moment: this is the Lamb - the Lamb of the new Passover - the sacrifice that makes all sacrifice possible; the offering that makes all offerings acceptable, the basis for our worship, the means of restoration and transformation. A new wellspring of life.**

**And so in all this, the baptism of our Lord is the sign...of a new creation. Now as in the beginning the spirit hovers over the waters; now as at the rebirth of the creation through the flood, the dove alights on the first shoots of the new order; now as in the great outpouring after the Ascension, the spirit bestows the unction of sonship - today you are my son this day I have begotten you... (/ anointed [with oil of gladness/dew of morning])**

**So this day - this day of all days - is surely not to be relegated to a lectionary footnote - instead it is worth marking with an asterisk in all our diaries, and on all our charts - because it isn't just a beginning; it isn't just the font from which has sprung our own washing of regeneration, and renewing by the Holy Ghost; it is the source of our baptisms, of our anointing, as sons of God, as co- heirs in the hope of eternal life, but it is that because, with the death, resurrection, and glorification it represents, it is not simply a past event - it is the living source we constantly exist in, the moment of our turning, over and again in penitence, to receive beauty for ashes, love for hate; the moment into which we willingly enter over and again as we come to the sacrament of water and wine and are drawn ever deeper into the mystery of gods love...**

**We discover in this transforming moment, the divisions between man and God, Jew and gentile, a people and not a people, servant and master are so utterly TRANSCENDED that in the words of Peter Chrysologus "this day" when Jesus stands before his cousin in the Jordan "is the day when the servant holds The Lord, man holds God, John holds Christ - holds as about to receive not to grant forgiveness..."**

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<sup>1</sup> cf Isa 44:13 v. 44:24-25 in Isa 44:6-end - the lesson appointed for the morning of the Octave in 1922 Lectionary on the immeasurable Alpha & Omega

**..and we come to realise, that this is the same threshold we stand upon weekly, daily, in the invitation to communion, the same exchange we will participate in this morning when we come forward to receive - the same mystery: by which man holds god, by which we hold Christ, as about to receive not grant reconciliation - the same eternal moment entered repeatedly here and now - 'Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world... Blessed are those who are called to the wedding supper of the Lamb.'**

**So as with Elijah and Elisha, as with John and Jesus, so now with us and our Lord, the threshold marked on the Sunday in the Octave of the Epiphany reveals itself to be the one at which servant and master change places, or better at which the servant begins to be taken up into the transforming work of the master - just as the Son was taken up in the work of the Father.**

**And the Epiphany reveals itself to be not just the sign of new creation in the singular person of Jesus, or the singular history of Israel, but the sign of the new humanity - the sons and servants of God anointed in the power of the same Spirit to *be Epiphany* - to open blind eyes, to bring them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. The Baptism in the Jordan is not just the beginning of the earthly ministry of the Christ, it is the genesis of our ministry - the way opened for us to follow him, to become partakers in his life, to become, through obedience to his words, part of his turning water into wine, his transformation of the creatures of time and space into his body and blood, part of his turning of lack and limit into love eternally poured out, part of the life of the Trinity.**

**So what is celebrated - was celebrated - on this day in the church's calendar is not just a day - perhaps that's why the Reformers removed it from the sequence of dates - it is the threshold we stand on every day, in light of the Epiphany of Our Lord - it is the continual invitation into discipleship - the continual call to offer our lives to be taken up with Christ's.**

**A new star *has* appeared in the sky and so a new history is *being* written, a new calendar created, and a new future mapped out...**

**But when the French Revolutionaries reset the calendar by the *light* of Malthus' blazing comet, they named 1789 Year One of Liberty, and they thought that freedom consisted in bringing kings to their knees and no man serving another one. They were entirely wrong. Year One of Liberty was a very long time earlier, and freedom consists in kings falling voluntarily to their knees, in obedience to one man, and in all men serving one another.**

**And what is even more important to note, the point in fact of this 8 Day Dawn is that in the only calendar worthy of the name, we do not move further and further from the source of our life or liberty but closer and closer to it, deeper and deeper into it - closer to the settling of debts, closer to the first and final day, closer to Alpha and Omega, closer to the call, closer to the banquet, to the best wine saved until last**

**A new star has appeared in the sky (the Magi saw it at its rising) and we are come to be caught up in its trail and led into the fruition of the glorious godhead.**