

The true light

John Witcombe *reflects on* Isaiah 9:1-4,
1 Corinthians 1:10-18 and Matthew 4:12-23

Epiphany is when we hear stories of God being revealed in the world – and when we ask for God to be revealed in our own lives. In today's readings we are encouraged to trust that no matter how dark, the true light will always shine – whether in the world, or in the Church. The first two readings set for today recognise that the people of God will sometimes find themselves walking in darkness, whether in the world (Isaiah) or even in the Church (Paul, in the letter to Corinth). Just as the world can feel a dark place because of violence and oppression, so even a local church can be a place where the darkness of disagreement and conflict can cloud the horizon.

Jesus speaks to us through the words of the Gospel, calling us to repent, to turn away from darkness and seek the light. If we are to follow him, it will always mean leaving something of our old life behind – and that's never going to be easy. It could be that the place where we are feels too dark to find the onward path so we just don't know where to tread. These are times to ask God to make it clear, step by step.

As we take single steps forward, following God's voice, the darkness will fade to grey and God's light will start to shine. The wise men followed a star: we follow the light of Christ, which the darkness will never extinguish. ☺

Holy God, you call us to step out of darkness into your marvellous light. Help us all, even those who find it hard to see the way, to find the path that leads back to you and your life for each of us. Amen.

New year, new life

Part 4 – true freedom

by Jane Williams

Christmas and New Year seem a long time ago, and the next break seems far in the future. Life is settling back to the humdrum, and it is very hard to see any signs of the new start we may have been hoping for in 2022.

Similarly, it is often hard for Christians to see signs of the "new life" that we have been promised in Jesus; the life we supposedly entered into when we were baptised or committed our lives

to Christ. We feel we ought to be visibly different, better people, but we are dismally aware that we aren't.

Some people cite the behaviour of Christians as one of the arguments against the existence of God, and they have a point. But it would surely be a much stronger argument if God expected of us things of which we are not fully capable. God knows us very well, and gives us freedom, rather than tasks on which we will be assessed as successes or failures. ☺



Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Every year the government department associated with farming demands that I count my sheep. They need to know how many rams, breeding ewes and other sheep I've got. Whatever they do with the information I always provide it. My sheep are my favourite things even above our dogs. I care for them and check them at least twice a day

just like other farmers do locally. Some have names, but not all. Some will go on to breed lambs of their own, some we will eat and some I will sell for others to breed from. Some are pedigree, most are scruffy mixtures. But each of them is equally precious to me.

I love the Bible passages about God the shepherd because they remind me what a high calling we have when we care for these creatures and how we, as high bred or scruffy people, matter equally to God. ☺

“The highest proof of the spirit is love.”

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) German theologian, musician, writer, humanitarian, philosopher and physician