

What's in a name?

Heather Cooke *reflects on* Isaiah 43:1-7

What love shines out of this passage from Isaiah! How would you feel if someone said to you today, "You are precious... and I love you"? Someone is. God is saying that to you, and addressing you by your name. Hear those words now in your heart, hear your own name being spoken to you by God as part of that wonderful declaration –

"You are precious... and I love you."

On the day when the Gospel story tells of the baptism of Christ, Christians are reminded of their own baptism, as Isaiah gives us God's words about names (and water). And both baptisms, of Jesus and

of Christians, tell us that God is with us, as promised in this prophecy. God is with us because we are loved, we are precious, we are called by name – whether it's our baptismal name or a nickname used by our friends and family.

The final verse reminds us that whatever name we use, we are also called by God's name. We are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God who loves us so much that Jesus died for us. In our baptism, we (or our godparents) respond to that great love by turning to Christ, by embracing him... as we would surely want to do when someone tells us that they love us. 😊

Loving God, you show yourself in Jesus, sharing our human life and joy and pain. Help us to accept the name he gave us, baptised as Christians, loving you again, through your beloved Son. Amen.

New year, new you

A new look

by William Hepper

Fashion gurus would have us expunge anything drab and dated from our wardrobe, to be replaced by up-to-the-minute fashion. The aim of this transformation, we're led to believe, is to enhance our outward appearance while increasing our inward confidence – at least until the next season!

St Paul is keen on clothing metaphors. In a passage calling to mind the reordering of the wardrobe (Colossians 3:9-10), he encourages his readers to

seek wholesale transformation of their lives in Christ, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator."

Next time you're looking for a new look, why not give Paul's words from Galatians (3:27) some thought: "As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

It's a more lasting choice than any high street brand, to be sure! 😊

“**And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight.**”

Philippians 1:9



Epiphany around the world Part II – King's Day

by Frank Garcia

In Western church calendars Epiphany commemorates the visit of the magi, as narrated in Matthew's Gospel. Magi were the "wise men" of the Persian Empire, where astronomy was particularly advanced. They were men of status.

In Spanish-speaking countries, 6 January is still known as Kings' Day, and is a day for gifts, commemorating those brought to the manger. Children leave shoes out overnight (and

perhaps a bowl of water for the camels), and wake – if they have been good – to find them filled with presents.

But the greatest gift, as surely the magi knew, is larger, more all-embracing. In allowing us to offer him our best gifts, God is really making the gift to us. As the Epiphany hymn has it ("Brightest and Best"):

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
vainly with gifts would his favour secure,
richer by far is the heart's adoration... 😊