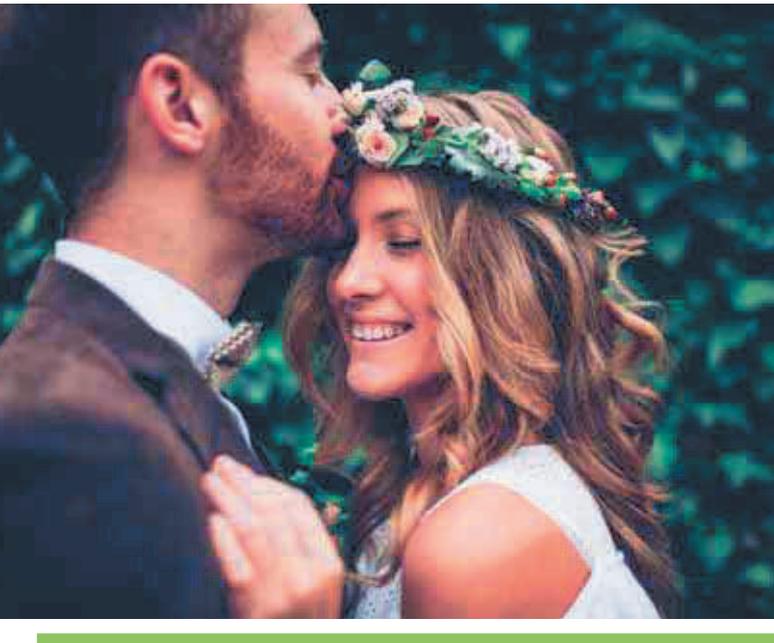


A fine romance



Heather Cooke *reflects on* Isaiah 62:1-5

We tend to think of romantic love as something modern. In the “olden days” marriages were all arranged, weren’t they? But you only have to look at passages like this in the Bible (and there are many more), to see that marriage for love is nothing new. On a day when the Gospel tells about Jesus rescuing a wedding in Cana, the imagery in Isaiah is also about happy couples.

Just as last week’s reading from Isaiah spoke of names and reminded us of baptism, so this week’s passage also mentions names: a bride’s new name. We might be reminded of the tradition (perhaps not so widespread today) of a woman taking her husband’s surname. Sometimes this has proved a blessing to someone who grew up disliking her own surname. Sometimes it can cause amusement... such as the world’s worst cook who fell in love with a man named Cooke. Who says God doesn’t have a sense of humour?

In the season of Epiphany, when we remember ways in which God is made known, how wonderful is that image of a delighted bridegroom! At a wedding, the couple make promises to love one another, to be faithful.

Throughout the Bible God makes similar promises to us and calls us to respond. It would be a very one-sided wedding if all the vows were made by just one partner. 😊

Faithful God, you endowed us with all our worldly goods. Help us not to waste the heavenly gifts you also gave us, but to use them to share your love with others. And in so doing keep our vows to you. Amen.

New year, new you *A change of direction*

by William Hepper

New Year is a good time to think about repentance. A big, serious and religious-sounding word, that, a bit scary for some, perhaps, although essentially it simply means “changing your mind”. And if changing our minds means anything at all, it will involve changing what we do. So repentance is about turning around or changing course, in mind and in action.

We, of course, are thinking in a religious context, so such a change

will be in relation to God: looking back at what we have done that has not met God’s standard and determining to do better in future. But for the Christian it is not all about what we do and think, but about what God does. Changing course before God is about seeking God’s forgiveness for what’s past and strength for the future. So in confession we ask God to, “forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may serve you in newness of life”.

Through repentance we can live in peace with our past and find a new and better path ahead. 😊

“ **Were the whole realm of nature mine, / that were an offering far too small. / Love so amazing, so divine, / demands my life, my soul, my all.”**

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), Congregational minister, hymn writer and theologian

Epiphany around the world *Part III – suffering and splendour*

by Frank Garcia

Epiphany is full of radiance: it already contains signs of the splendour of fullness of life in God. The “star with royal beauty bright” will guide us to God’s “perfect light”.

But the journey will involve suffering. Hence, in an interesting addition to the gold and frankincense prophesied by Isaiah, the Magi bring a third gift: myrrh.

The well-known hymn “We Three Kings” spells out the significance of the gifts, with one verse for each: gold is for royalty, and frankincense for prayerful worship. But somehow, the divine epiphany would not be complete without embracing pain and death: Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume / Breathes a life of gathering gloom / Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying / Sealed in the stone-cold tomb. 😊