

**Wednesday Word 5th January 2022**  
**Dr Heather Payne, Consultant Paediatrician**

I have a terribly sad job to do later- taking down my Christmas decorations. Tonight is Twelfth night, and I'll be packing away the angels, the baubles, tinsel and the cheerful lights – yes, Christmas is over. But that means that tomorrow is the feast of the Epiphany. That's a bit of a strange word- in the Christian church it's used to mean 'appearing' or 'showing forth', to help people realise that the infant Jesus, born into a Jewish family, was on earth for everyone- every country, race and creed, a Christmas gift from God to us all.

Epiphany has a different emphasis in world traditions- gifts are important – our carol 'We three kings of Orient are' tells of the wise men arriving with gold, frankincense and myrrh, and finding the baby Jesus in humble surroundings, not the royal palace they were expecting. In Spain it's called the feast of the Three Kings, and it's another time of gift giving.

A second aspect of the festival is water- remembering the baptism of Jesus by John, in the Jordan river, in front of crowds of people, who were amazed to hear God speak and say this was his son. In Russia, some Hardy men commemorate this by diving into freezing lakes to retrieve a wooden cross thrown in by the priest. I had a memorable experience of being in Egypt at this time 3 years ago. I was part of a huge procession of Coptic Christians, following a cross out from the church to their nearest river- there, they submerged the cross deep into the water – sanctifying it to flow out on to the fields, so blessing the crops, and in time giving them food and life.

The third theme of Epiphany is wine- Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding where they'd run out of drink – he astonished the wine waiter by turning stone jars of water into the best vintage, so people could understand he had power as God's son.

These three bible stories show God flabbergasting people back then, just as he does now in this wonderful and ever surprising story of Jesus amongst us. I know that hearing all three together helps me understand the ways that his presence can provide hope and brightness in our lives long after the fairy lights are back in the cupboard.

So we can take our pick of gifts, water, or wine to help us through these darker months – just make mine sparkling!