



Prepare Ye The Way



How often do we open ourselves up to change? Especially at Christmas, when we are warmed by tradition and the familiar, and find comfort in people and homes we know well, we don't always welcome things that will disrupt us from our norm.

Over the next four weeks of advent, as once again we prepare the way for Jesus' arrival, we will reflect on how we might be disrupted from our norm by seeking out **transformational encounter**.



In the Magnificat we read,
"He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the humble".

Do we recognise our own pride and might
which needs to be undone?

Do we see the hunger of those who hope to be filled?
How can we join in the work of God and cause holy disruption?



Join us on this journey to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival through transformational encounter. Look out for more stories and reflections, by following us on social media:

Twitter: @publicissues

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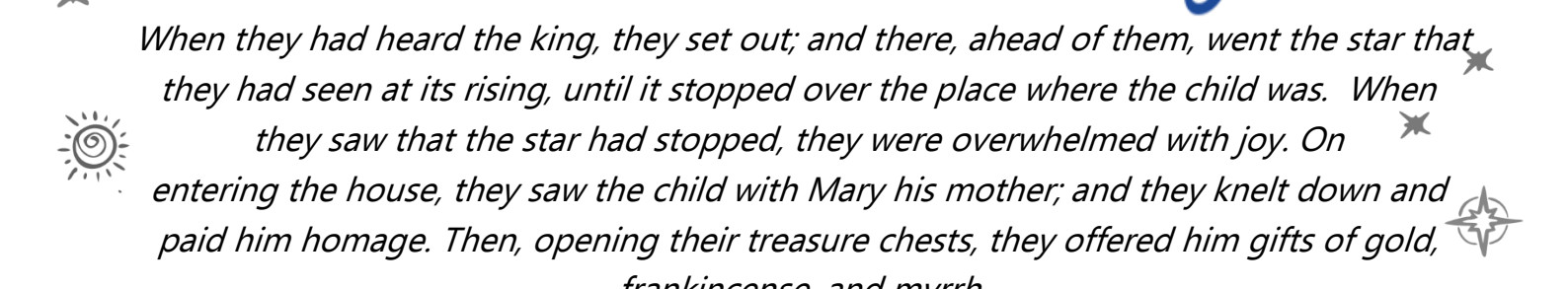
Keep in touch, and let us know about the effect of your transformational encounters using **#prepareyetheway**.



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Week 1: One Body



When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2: 9-11

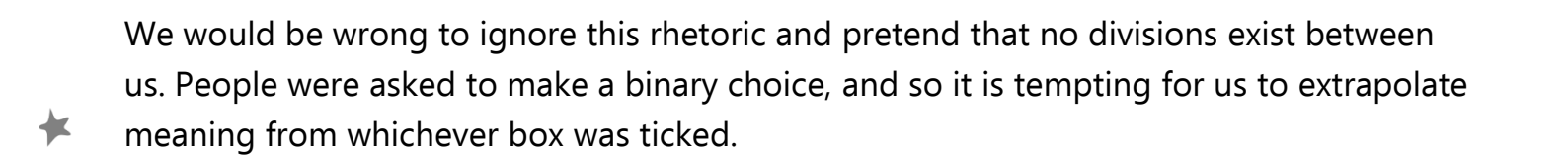
Many times in the Bible, we are reminded of the importance of Christian unity. We are one body. We are to be united in word and thought. We are to live in harmony with one another.



This is considerably easier in theory than practice. We are all different, but sometimes our differences lead to fractures even in our churches and family units.

As a nation, our differences have been brought into sharp focus by Brexit. Our response to a single question, to leave or remain, has seen us all categorised simplistically into two groups: the 52% and the 48%. Instead of bringing our disagreements before one another and before God, very often the temptation is to dismiss alternative points of view as inferior to our own.

The language used around Brexit is often unhelpful. People who express their concerns are dismissed as 'remoaners'. The Collins Dictionary has chosen 'gammon' as its word of the year for 2018, used insultingly in the context of 'a person, typically middle-aged and white, with reactionary views, especially one who supports the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union'. This undignified language is not used by everyone, but it pollutes the discourse and affects us all.



We would be wrong to ignore this rhetoric and pretend that no divisions exist between us. People were asked to make a binary choice, and so it is tempting for us to extrapolate meaning from whichever box was ticked.



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Strong opinions were – and still are – held on both sides of the argument. But nor should we be fooled into thinking that our divisions are eternally irreconcilable.

As we approach 2019, the year when some questions will be answered and many more will arise, how will we respond to political disagreements?

Perhaps we can learn something from those who travelled to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The learned Magi, bearing riches and worldly knowledge, and the provincial shepherds, still reeling from the sight of an angelic host in the sky, arrived at the manger from very different places. They would have embarked on their journeys to the manger with very different experiences of life. Their understandings of the divine would have been so incongruent that their arrival at the very same point seems baffling.

And yet here they are, kneeling before the same God who marked his arrival on Earth in the form of a lowly infant. Here they are, stepping into a transformational encounter with the divine.

Encounters with Jesus inevitably lead to change. But as we encounter the divine, we do not forgo our own identities. Our relationship with God calls us into fellowship with believers, but we are not called to passive conformity. Rather, we are called to honour and value one another through our differences.

A. W. Tozer asks in 'The Pursuit of God':

'Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.'

Different instruments, yet in tune with another. Journeying from different places, we all arrive at a place of unity, gathered around the manager.



As God calls the wise men and shepherds to celebrate the birth of his son, he declares the truly inclusive nature of his kingdom. He casts the foundations wide, inviting the learned and the provincial to join with him, actively seeking out differences in society. Our God embraces difference – he is bigger than the divisions that threaten to overwhelm us.

Before Immanuel, 'God with us', who lived, died and rose again for us, we find our unity made complete.

We will hold different opinions about the best course for our nation's future, but this need not be an excuse to avoid dialogue. In fact, it is an encouragement to engage with one another. For when we encounter the living God, who transcends all our differences, whose love binds us all together in perfect harmony, how can we fail to work together?

Questions:

Take time to consider where you might have used a difference in opinion as a dividing point.

Where have you been quick to speak, and slow to listen?

When have you chosen not to hear the opinions of others?

Challenge:

Is there someone in your life from whom you are divided because of Brexit? Maybe it's a friend, a family member, a colleague or even a group of people in your community.

Challenge yourself to step into transformational encounter, by choosing to meet with them. Challenge yourself to listen.

Maybe you could use the opportunity to talk to those around you about what you want your community to look like after Brexit.

Prayer:

God of Unity,

Thank you that you are one, always in unity with one another and with you.
Thank you that you see beyond division, and call us into fellowship with yourself.

We are sorry that we often resist this call,
and instead allow our differences to divide us.

Call us again into transformational encounter with your spirit of unity,
that we might be 'tuned' to your voice, to hear yourself and one another.
Humble us, that we might kneel by the manger and know that in your divine
kingdom, we all serve the same God.

Amen.



As the Joint Public Issues Team, we work to try and build hope of a society which
seeks to hold the most vulnerable at the centre, despite conflict and division. This is
explored through many different areas of our work.

Why not find out more about the workplan of the Joint Public Issues Team at
www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/about-us.



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