

The devil is no fool, he knew that Jesus would rather not be crucified, after all didn't Jesus say so in gethsemane, "Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."

The devil himself may not speak to us audibly today, but we nevertheless, all hear his voice...From politicians, from the media, Hollywood, and television, we hear voices that say 'You can do this on your own...you can leave God out of the picture and still do alright, that you just have to work harder, believe in yourselves, and work together, and everything will be alright.

But is a lie....

The writer Eugene Peterson says we are lied to all the time...that there are voices which claim to tell us who we are and yet omit everything about our origin and destiny in God. That they talk about the world without telling us that God made it. That they tell us about our bodies without telling us that they are temples of the Holy Spirit. They instruct us in love without telling us about the God who loves us and gave himself for us."

Rescue me he says from the person who tells me of life but omits Christ, who is wise in the ways of the world but ignores the movement of the Spirit."

Jesus said "And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

It's only when we listen to the truth, when our sight is set on the horizon of God that we discover, and get to, the right destination and in the right way, even though it may bring suffering... Walking were told is one of the best forms of exercise. It stimulates our hearts and lungs, strengthens our bones and muscles, increases blood flow throughout the body, and can also contribute to the loss of excess weight. The average pair of feet takes about two and a half million steps a year and in our lifetime, we will walk approximately 115,000 miles.

The first man to walk around the world was David Kunst of Minnesota finishing his 4 and a half year, 15,000-mile journey on October 5, 1974 going through 22 pairs of shoes. Most of us would feel tired even contemplating such a thing...however, God wants us to understand that the Christian life is a journey which requires us to walk in dedication, courage, and persistence.

It calls for self-surrender, a life of constant listening and with an intense desire to please God rather than ourselves. Being a follower of Jesus will not always mean driving on a motorway, we will not always have the roof down in the sun, happy music playing. At times we will get a puncture, we may lose a bumper or a shoe, we may even feel like pulling over in a layby and giving up...

But friends, it's in those times when the heavens feel like brass and we feel as if there's no voice from heaven, to hear or even listen that we gather ourselves around those who can encourage us in the journey, who can remind us that We are Gods Sons and daughters in whom he is well pleased, and that he will never leave or forsake us until our journeys end. **Amen.**

## Epiphany 1 2020 - *The Baptism of Christ* St Mary's Sanderstead

Isaiah 42:1-9 / Psalm 29 / Matthew 3:13-end

'Faith on the journey' Fr Grant Cohen

In a carol service a member of the congregation (not this one) was taking part in a dramatic reading of the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus. And then the unthinkable happened...for when it came to the line "and I bring frankincense" he said "and I bring Frankenstein."

Someone said that if the wise men had been women things would have been very different. They would have asked directions sooner, would have arrived on time, would have helped Mary to deliver the baby, cleaned up the stable, and taken practical gifts like nappies, baby-wipes and milk.

On the 6th January 1858, a 21-year-old man was ill in bed. As a devout Christian, and knowing that it was the Feast of the Epiphany, he read the Gospel for the day, where Matthew recalls the journey of the wise men.

Inspired by that reading, William Chatterton Dix wrote what has become one of the most popular Epiphany hymns, 'As with gladness men of old, did the guiding star behold'.

It's a hymn that takes up the theme of the Magi's journey, their pilgrimage.

And so in this epiphany tide as we reflect on the baptism of Christ and the beginning of his journey towards the cross I want us to think a little bit about our own journey of faith...

I wonder how many of you still use or have these? *(a cassette tape)*

When I was a young teenager my most prized possession was my cassette player. I loved it because it had the ability to change how I felt through the music I played through it...

I think how we feel, is so often, a reflection of whose voice were listening to...

One-night last year my nephew who as you know is staying me at the moment came down stairs, it was about one a clock in the morning on the Thursday night. I was watching you tube. I'd had a couple of glasses of wine and was feeling very sorry for myself choosing all the songs that reminded me of past love, past failure and broken dreams.

I soon cheered up though because opening the lounge door my nephew who so rudely interrupted my melancholic visit to the past said...

"I'm sorry uncle Grant, but please can you turn down your emotional music I'm trying to get to sleep." I was mortified, and me and my sister Jacobs mum laughed so much the next day.

Our psalm this morning reminds us whose voice we ought to be listening to as we journey in faith.

“The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation...the voice of the Lord is glorious, the voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees, the voice of the Lord makes the Lebanon skip like a calf...”

I wonder what our recollection of God’s voice is today....?

Neil Armstrong, once took a trip to the Old City of Jerusalem. He went to the Hulda Gate, which opens to the Temple Mount and he asked a guide whether Jesus had in fact walked that same path, and when told that he had, Neil humbly replied: “I have to tell you, I am more excited stepping on these stones than I was stepping on the moon.”

There’s something about the place where God has been, the place where he has spoken that electrifies our souls...

Back in the day, I had an Escort XR3i convertible, and I loved nothing more than taking the roof down on a warm summers day and blaring out both emotional and happy music as I drove towards my destination and I wished then as maybe I still do now that life could always be like driving a convertible, listening to the voices that make me feel good.

The trouble is, no matter how bright the day is, night eventually comes. Our life of faith is the ultimate road trip? But as well as having smooth open motorways, we also have ups and downs, detours, bumps, sharp corners, and flat tyres... times when all we want to do is pull over and take a rest...

We’ve begun a New Year, and for some, if not all of us, that also means a new journey... And who of us knows what will happen along the way...

Maybe it will be the loss a job, maybe an illness for which will be no recovery, ongoing frailty which means the loss of old joys....maybe we will find ourselves anxious about how we’re going to pay the bills...whatever the journey all of us will at times struggle and worry over all sorts of things.

It’s part of being human...part of being alive.

Along the journey we will all ask at some point both for ourselves and for others...  
Where is the justice?  
Where is the peace?  
Where is the love?  
Why is life so unfair?

In times of vulnerability, helpless as we may feel when life throws us a curve ball, It’s then that we must ask ourselves ‘Whose voice are we going to listen to?’

The ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius said that “Before a man can do things, there must be things he will not do.”

As we begin a new year with a new journey its poignant that we read of Jesus’ baptism, for baptism is for so many of us where our journey of faith begins.

As Jesus comes out of the water, he hears the voice of his Father, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

Our first reading from Isaiah was Jesus’ calling spoken hundreds of years before he was even born... “Here is my servant whom I uphold, in him my soul delights...Thus says the Lord who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it. I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you...I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon from the from the prison those who are in darkness.”

If you had been Isaiah, writing down those wonderful words I doubt you would have contemplated the suffering messiah carrying his cross to Calvary, for his words sound like a life of motorway driving.

But with the gift of hindsight, we know that Jesus will carry a cross, that God won’t save him from being hurt, from suffering, from sadness. But we also know that he won’t abandon Jesus and will walk there with him...

Every time Jesus was rejected, every time he was abused, spat upon, slandered, lied about, he had to choose whose voice he would listen to, and so do we...

And as he walked towards the wilderness to be tempted, he was resolute and determined to do what he had to do in order to get where he had to get...so that you and I could be saved.

The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance, it was an agreement to turn away from the world and towards God but while Jesus didn’t need to repent, he still had to choose...“I do nothing on my own, he said, “I only do what I see my Father doing...”

The trouble is from the beginning of our lives we’re told that we can be self-sufficient, and handle things on our own. We are told that all we have to do is exert a little more effort through science, education, good government and politics and we can make the world a better place.

The devil told Jesus all you have to do is fall down and worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world...and guess what, you won’t have to be crucified to get it...

He was offering Jesus a life of just motorways...

But isn’t that what we all want...a journey with no pain, even a destination without a journey...