

CALLAN PARISH NEWSLETTER

Readers: 5/6th Jan.: 6.30 p.m Padhraic Moran; 8.30 a.m. Bridie Bergin; 11.00 .m. Ailis Carey; **7/8 Jan:** 6.30 p.m. Aoife Lynch; 8.30 a.m. Colin Aherne; 11.00 a.m. Colm Keher

Feast of the Epiphany, Friday 6th January 2017, Holy Day of obligation : Vigil Mass on Thursday 5th Jan, 6.30 p.m.; Frid. 8.30 a.m. & 11.00 a.m.

The spiritual meaning of Epiphany: This feast marks the coming of the Three Kings or Three Wise Men. In the Eastern Church this is celebrated as Christmas while in the West we often refer to it as “Little Christmas” or ‘Nollaig na mBan’. The biblical story of the star leading the wise men is one that touches a chord and holds a profound message for people of every generation. Although they were ‘wise men’, left to their own innate wisdom they were unable to find where the Messiah had been born. The intrigue of King Herod didn’t help either. There are still plenty of Herod figures about with their own vested interests. Ultimately they were forced to fall back on the priests and scribes who in turn had to consult the Scriptures to find out where the Messiah was to be born. In other words human wisdom can take us only so far along the journey of life; if we are to complete that journey we too must turn to that wisdom from on high which the Scriptures alone can supply. Human wisdom no matter how impressive it might appear at the time is less than perfect and will ultimately fail us. Maybe this explains what is happening in our broken world right now. Have we vested too much faith in man and too little

in God?

St. Francis and the Crib: It is to St. Francis of Assisi that we owe the Crib. On Christmas Eve 1223 he re-created the scene of Jesus’ birth inside a cave at Greccio, a little hill town located about one hundred miles north of Rome on the way to Assisi. St. Francis had visited the Holy Land sometime earlier and was intent on helping of the poor, peasant and illiterate people of Greccio appreciate better the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. He set up an empty manger within the cave and introduced a live donkey and ox. In time to range and variety of animals would increase even to the inclusion of a fox. A special place would be reserved for the Three Kings when they would arrive laden down with gifts on the feast of the Epiphany. In subsequent centuries the Crib scene formed a fertile field for medieval and renaissance artists, each having their own peculiar slant on the scene.

Important dates in 2017: First Communion: Sunday 14 May. Lent begins with **Ash Wednesday, 1st March.**
Confirmations: Sun. 2 April 2017; Easter Sunday 16 April 2017.

Cemetery Masses as usual: Kilbride – last Friday of June, 8 p.m.; Coolagh – first Friday of July 8 p.m.; Newtown: last Friday of July 7.30 p.m..

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord: This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and as we do so we are invited to reflect on our own baptism and that of our children. Formerly we used to view baptism as the excising of the great

wart of original sin which each one had inherited from our first parents, Adam & Eve. This explained why baptisms were carried out within the first few days of birth and normally at home where most children were born. The earlier baptismal parish records have only a single date for birth and baptism, the inference being that the priest was summoned to the home as soon as the child was born. This changed in the 1940s & 50s when more and more children were born in hospitals. Nevertheless the baptism was only delayed for no more than a few days, the reason being that the purpose of baptism was still primarily to rid the child of original sin. Through the centuries scholars and theologians debated the fate of children who died before baptism. Would they go to heaven or would they not! The consensus was that they were consigned to a place or state called 'limbo' (literally meaning the 'periphery' of heaven where they were spared any punishment because they had not committed any personal sin. This theological opinion leaned heavily on parents and families who had to cope with stillbirth. It also explains why non baptised infants were buried in a special area of the cemetery or in separate locations altogether. How could one reconcile the idea of a loving and merciful God denying a totally innocent infant the fullness of eternal happiness in heaven!

The theory of evolution proposed by Darwin and others in the 19th century raised serious questions about this whole teaching. How can we speak of original sin if there were no first parents as the theory of evolution would seem to suggest?

Today we speak of original sin being located within each one of us – that inner discord, disconnect, disharmony that we experience within each one of us i.e. knowing the good that we want to do but being helpless when it came to doing it. It is here that baptism comes to our rescue. Baptism inserts us into the community of believers who espouse a value system and way of living that enables us to overcome that innate, inner division and disharmony within our own selves. The God that we worship is not an abstract figure in the heavens but rather one who manifests himself through the goodness, commitment and dedication of people responding to his invitation to love.

By belonging to the community of believers are equipped to come to grips with and overcome that attraction to do evil rather than good. Hence the faith of the parents, family and wider community play a pivotal role. God's grace rubs off on us. God's grace comes to us through other people because grace is not a 'thing' or 'object' that is poured out upon us in some magical way in the waters of baptism. When parents present their child for baptism they want their child to grow up to inherit the values, the hopes, the joys and the expectations that have served them well to find their way and pick their steps through the thorns and trials of life. About a year ago George Hook, the well known rugby pundit and veteran broadcaster in an interview in the *Irish Catholic* spelled out very passionately how important his faith was for him. It was like a compass leading him through the complexities of life.