

A message from Bishop Rachel

7 January 2025



In these early days of January it has been wonderful hearing so many local stories of worship and welcome over Christmas. Hundreds and hundreds of people of all ages across this diocese have been givers and receivers of the gift of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ, as they have participated in carol services, Christingle and crib services, and been welcomed at an array of events.

Yesterday marked the end of Christmas, and as we celebrated those gift-bearing Magi journeying to find the newborn King, so began the season of revelation – of Epiphany.

The visitors from the East were strangers and in terms of faith and culture they seemingly did not belong with the people and family of the infant Jesus Christ, yet as they encountered him, there was revelation not only for themselves as they beheld this tiny baby, but also in the strange gifts they brought which mysteriously reveal truths about the child's identity: gold for a king, frankincense of a priest, and myrrh for embalming at death.

This is a strange scene of power so different from most of those with which we are familiar. The Magi with their assumed wisdom and wealth may well be deemed as powerful, whilst the tiny vulnerable child is readily seen as powerless, yet here lies God. This is a beautiful and mysterious scene of mutual gift-giving and receiving, and of power-sharing beyond our understanding, and one which I find both strengthening and poignant as we enter 2025.

As we look back on 2024, not least in the Church of England, there is much to reflect on regarding power and gift. There is the power which is exercised to enable the flourishing of all people – the power which enables people of all ages and backgrounds to be valued as gift and to flourish through the offering of their gifts; and there is the power which dominates, destroys or abuses – a power which is self-seeking or which fails to pay attention to the gift of each person, not least to those who feel as if they have no power. And as I look back and look forward, I am not only thinking of those we immediately identify as powerful, whether political leaders, Magi, bishops and archbishops, or CEOs, or those with titles, but of every follower of Jesus Christ in their different spheres of daily life. Every child, young person and adult has power, and we exercise it in every choice we make in our use of words, our interactions and how we live each day.

As we enter 2025, I pray we learn yet more about kneeling in adoration before Christ who 'emptied himself', and taught us what it means to be a servant, such that we 'look not to our own interests but to the interests of others' (Philippians 2:1-8), and use our

power and gifts to the glory of God, enabling and recognising the gifts of those around us from the youngest to the oldest.

I am hugely thankful for all those places across this diocese where I see this countercultural exercising of power, which is not about abdicating the authority, roles and responsibilities which people are called to in different seasons of life, but is about the exercising of power to live and share Christ's life in all its fullness, continually desiring moments of epiphany in people's lives.

As well as yesterday being the Feast of the Epiphany, it was also the day when Justin Welby laid down his archbishop's staff and relinquished his power as Archbishop of Canterbury. In the mess and pain which has led to his early departure, and as we rightly continue to focus on the pain and suffering of victims and survivors of abuse and the Church's failings, we all need to be aware of our own brokenness as we kneel before God, and offer ourselves afresh, longing that we might be gift in our broken world.

Amid the lament and brokenness, I am grateful for the places and ways in which Archbishop Justin's ministry has been gift, and I particularly think of the way he was able to see and participate in the sharing of Christ's love and hope with so many people of all ages across this diocese during our mission weekend last May.

As I pray for him, so too I pray for us as a diocese that in this season of Epiphany there might be fresh revelation of God's glory and grace, and that we might all take time to reflect individually and together on the use of our power and gifts for the revelation of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven.

This comes with my thanks and prayers for the ministry in which we all share as a new year unfolds.

+ Rachel