



The Solemnity of the Epiphany 5 January 2025 **Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh**

“A Light for the Nations” (Isaiah 42)

I began this Reflection on 1st January, and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and International Day of Prayer for Peace.

I believe many of us still think of New Year’s Day as a Day of New Beginnings: maybe to do more exercise or to restart a diet. Catholics also think of it as a day to take up some spiritual practice. Father Andrew at Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, said to me: “I’m away, but I think we should begin the New Year with Mass”; I agreed because the Mass unites our plans whatever they are to the Lord Jesus born for us.

One of the best ways to unite ourselves with Him is in Holy Communion, but also to look to the example of Mary Mother of Jesus on the day of celebrating her as Mother of God 1st January. We’re told in the Gospel that the shepherds went to see the wonder of the birth of Jesus and returned to make known all that they had seen and “*Mary pondered all these things in her heart*”.

We’re at the beginning of a special year, a Holy Year which is only kept every 25 years so it is a good day to think, to ponder on what we might put in place this year by way of spiritual renewal, new beginnings.

The Church in the Holy Year puts a number of things before us and it is a good time to ponder on them:

- one is the theme of Holy Year, Pilgrims of Hope; we are all pilgrims i.e. we journey towards our eternal homeland. On our journey an outstanding model, our example is Mary, and that’s why in offering us special graces in the Holy Year a Pilgrimage to a Shrine of Mary is prominent.
- In this Diocese we have Evesham: where Mary appeared in the 700’s, the priest there is offering monthly days to visit and pray at the Church dedicated to Our Lady & St Egwin, the Bishop who built an Abbey there to mark the Apparition.
- Then nationally we have Walsingham with a special Diocesan Pilgrimage on 10 May.

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- And of course there is Lourdes, and Knock in Ireland: a favourite place of mine from childhood: it offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a special theme in Holy Year; it is a place where Mary stood with the people in poorer times.

Then 1 January, the International Day of Prayer for Peace takes us out of ourselves to reflect on the world around us. It was Pope St Paul VI in 1967 who initiated Prayer for Peace on this day each year. While wonderful firework displays took place across the country and across the world on New Years Eve and words of Hope and Peace lightened the darkness, that is on all sides, we are conscious that it is essential we pray and work for Peace in this New Year, starting with our own families and communities.

With Mary standing alongside us and in the power of the Eucharist we journey on as Pilgrims of Hope in Jesus the Saviour whose 'naming' we celebrate too on this Day. He alone can raise us up to the new life He came to bring, so let us make a resolution to live closer to Him in 2025: with a pilgrimage; confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; a healing of a broken relationship in the family of community? With the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter's, Rome, on Christmas Eve, Pope Francis emphasised the desire of the Church for all to enter into a new relationship with Jesus in the Holy Year.

Just before Christmas Day we had the Winter Solstice (21 December) the day of the shortest period of daylight and the longest night of the year: it is the beginning of the lengthening of days and the shortening of nights; the day when the Hong Kong Community (among others) celebrates the gradual increase of light till the Summer Solstice on 21 June this year. I enjoyed a wonderful Hong Kong family meal. It is no accident that Christmas Day, the coming of the Light of the World, is celebrated around this date too. And we continue this theme of the light in darkness in the celebration of the Epiphany: The Magi, coming from different cultures, represent us in searching for the light of the world. The Reading from the Prophet Isaiah for the Epiphany proclaims: *"Rise, shine, for your light has come."* We are encouraged, especially in the Jubilee Year to search afresh for Jesus, the Light of the World, and to place Him at the centre of our Faith journey. The increase of light following the Winter Solstice is a fact: each day there is a little more light. We're called to be beacons of light, beacons of light that shine in the darkness of the world around us. The Liturgy of the Church, especially in the Eucharist, encourages us. At the Mass for Christmas Day we read from St John's Gospel:

"In him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

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