

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 7th January 2018
Epiphany Sunday

The season of miracles.

Last Sunday, having the day off and being in London on a Sunday I went to St James, Piccadilly. As a community they do some interesting things with liturgy I wanted to experience for myself and it is a place which has a good reputation for worship.

As is the churches practice they have a new art installation by Annabella Dorman entitled 'Suspended'. Annabella is a recognised and respected war artist having worked in Iraq and Afghanistan. This piece is a response to the refugee crisis arising from the conflicts in the Middle East. It is made up of discarded clothing collected on the beaches and roadsides of Lesbos, belongings of those who had fled the wars of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iraq. The garments are suspended from the ceiling and act as a canopy over the gathered congregation. The garments direct the viewer towards the conflicts and their human consequences as well as to the question of what has happened to them? Where are they now? What was their continued or continuing story? One piece that held my attention was a blue baby grow with the words on it 'My 1st Christmas, ever!'. It was dirty and torn and I wondered what that child's second birthday, and third birthday was like. It is no accident that as we gathered around the altar to receive the broken bread and common cup of the eucharist this image and the many others created in each viewer by this installation gave extra meaning. Christ's broken body placed before us on the altar, reflected in the broken bodies that would once have occupied the clothes above us.

Jesus was visited by three foreigners. Men of different culture, different religion, different race to Jesus. They came proclaiming his kingship, divinity and sacrifice. We like to think of this story as one that includes us gentiles in the story of salvation. Maybe it is a story of how we, as Easter people, people of the Jesus-faith should be prepared to receive others.

There are many issues arising in western politics linked with people and population movement. I'm not going to go into them here. I am going to ask what should be the response of us who claim Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, of him to receive people of difference, not just in the Magi; in the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Roman centurion, the prisoner crucified with him. I encourage you to go and see Annabella Dorman's installation at St James' and ask what you should be doing in the name of him who received strangers.