

*A sermon for the Parish of the Epiphany, preached by the rector, the Reverend Thomas James Brown, on the Second Sunday of Christmas, 3 January 2010. To God be the glory.*

## Holy Janitors

At the monastery in Cambridge on Friday morning one of the monks read a sermon. It wasn't his, he wasn't the writer, only the deliverer. The sermon was written by our friend, Tim Crellin, the rector at St. Stephen's in the South End.

In Tim's excellent sermon he introduced us to the ancient Roman god Janus, the god with two faces, the one that looked forward, and the one that looked back; Janus was the god of beginnings and the god of endings. You'll remember that he gives his name to this month, January. What you may not know is that our word "janitor" also comes from Janus. Janitors--the keeper of doorways.

So let me tell you about June Dove. June was the janitor at the Paynesville School, a 6 room schoolhouse. Three of the rooms were kindergartens, including mine. Kindergarten wasn't easy for me, and if you couldn't master the task of tying shoe laces, maybe it wasn't easy for you, either. But June Dove, a star of sorts, led me to her little alcove, filled with cleaning supplies and the putrid smell of her stale cigarettes, and to a doorway. The doorway was tucked behind the main hallway, and that's where she'd have me stand, out of the view of other pupils. And in that doorway she'd tie my shoes. And that janitor's willingness to shower a little extra affection became for me grace. In June Dove's doorway there was a sanctuary for me.

We might think of ourselves as holy janitors. Wouldn't that be a great thing for the Parish of the Epiphany...if we became known as the church of janitors? A church with people who said,  
"Come, stand here, and we'll shower a little extra affection on you."  
"Come sit here, and we'll listen to your deepest fears and your deepest needs."  
"Come kneel here, and we'll pray with you and lay hands on you."

We create doorways which lead to healing and comfort. But doorways lead to other things, to which our scripture today attests.

This parish takes its name from the moment when wise ones from the east, seeking a new king, entered through a doorway and encountered God in Christ. It wasn't a doorway they expected. They went first to the place one might expect to find a new born king, to the palace door in Jerusalem. Instead they found God through a door in a small abode in Bethlehem, an unexpected place from whence their lives were changed.

Our special patrons are drawn by a star to encounter God, an encounter that undoes them, and at the same time, an encounter that opens them to understand God, one who leaps down from the stars and pitches a tent among us.

As they enter, the magi kneel and they do more than pay homage, they worship. They open their treasure chests, and with them their hearts—hearts undefended and hearts ready to make room for the child in Mary's arms.

The child himself opens doorways for the Parish of the Epiphany. He'll lead us not only to doorways of strength, but also to doorways we have yet to envisage. More than one of us has come through the doors on Church Street looking for a friendly church here in Winchester only to find, in a short time amongst us, a community of children in Honduras. And so it is that people cross these doorways seeking refuge from the world, only to find themselves in places where the world's needs are the greatest. And so it is that the person coming through these doorways who desires the transcendence of God in the majesty of this church, may find himself kneeling to tie the shoes of a child in a basement Sunday School room.

The doorways through which the Wise Men entered brought knowledge, not only of the goodness of God, but also of brokenness in the world. So it should come as no surprise that to enter these doorways is an invitation to join God's reconciling mission to heal the world.

We celebrate this special feast for us, surrounded by familiar images: three crowns, wise men on camels and on their knees, worshipping in devotion and awe. But remember these images as well: a door, perhaps slightly ajar, that almost seems to beckon to you, a door through which you feel compelled to pass through, for on the other side of that door is the place where we will meet Jesus Christ face to face: not only as the babe in the manger, not only in the sacraments of the church, but in the sacrament of the world around us, in all of its complexity and contradiction.

And if we remember such doorways, then we can also remember the doorkeepers - the holy janitors – June Dove, or Fred Benson, or any other who carves a door through which we glimpse, and then receive, the friendship of Jesus Christ.

And as we remember those janitors, remember too that while there were only three wise men; maybe more – we don't know for sure--remember that you can always be a holy janitor. Epiphany has been, and can continue to be, known for following the star, for seeking as those who are wise always do, and for becoming holy doorkeepers who create new paths for Christ to be made known and served in the world. Amen.