

## **BE AGLOW WITH THE SPIRIT, SERVE THE LORD**

Confirmation, St Anne, Tottenham

Epiphany II

Sunday January 18<sup>th</sup> 2015

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My starting point may be a dangerous one, seeing that we are in Tottenham, albeit South Tottenham! You will see why in a moment! If you had taken the Piccadilly Line, just up the road at Manor House, in the 1920s, after one stop at Finsbury Park, the next station you went through was Gillespie Road. It was not until 1932 that it was renamed Arsenal and the leader of the campaign to change the name was Herbert Chapman, Arsenal's manager, and undoubtedly the man who made them into a world name.

Chapman, who'd come from Huddersfield Town, transformed the former Woolwich team. They carried off trophy after trophy. It was Chapman who pioneered floodlighting at football stadiums. Chapman too invented numbering players on their shirts. In 1932, he called on Frank Pick, the genius behind London's underground system: 'Why's this station called Gillespie Road?' he asked. 'Because that's where it is', replied Pick. 'But no-one's ever heard of Gillespie Road – it should be called Arsenal.' And from November 1932 onwards, that's been its name.

Now, I begin with Chapman, not to rub Arsenal's name in the face of any Spurs supporters here this evening – although as a lifelong Arsenal supporter it is tempting! No, the reason for starting with Chapman is that his spirit helped transform a mediocre team into a world beating club. In doing so the whole environment changed. Even the stands he built had to stay when Arsenal moved to the Emirates. They are listed Art-Deco buildings. Chapman, a devout member of the Church of England is buried in the churchyard at St Mary's, Hendon.

Now today, as we celebrate the baptism of Jenefer Cabaj, Caswell Hall, Rebecca O'Donovan, and Marcio Andrade, and the confirmation of these and also of Robin Allen, Jessica Cabraz, Dave Maunga, Marcia Peart, Natoya Williams, Orane Williams, Julia Woods, Jolene Benda, David Fasuyi, Ibijoke Fasuyi, Perez Faulkner and Phi-Long, we are celebrating their transformation by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Let's go back, for a moment, to our two readings and let's begin with the gospel. It's one of those stories repeated in Matthew, Mark and *Luke*, from whom we heard it today. It's a cameo story with some drama. Jesus challenges his disciples, his inner group of followers, to ask them who he is. Different answers emerge, but it's Peter who hits the nail on the head: 'You are the Christ of God.' In other words: 'You are God's anointed one.'

Then, that beautiful piece from St Paul's letter to the Romans is of a very different nature. It's almost a response to a 'so what' question to the Gospel. So, if Jesus is the anointed Son of God *what* does that mean for us? It means, of course, a complete pattern of life. So, let's revert for a moment to my story of Herbert Chapman. He was a good man and a professional, but more than that he transformed the culture, he changed the way people behaved – both the football team itself, and all associated with the club. That was the key to the new world of the 1930s at Arsenal.

So it is for us, but on a far deeper scale, of course. God appears as one of us – we have just celebrated that at *Christmas*. In Jesus, God is then taken to all the nations, that's what we've just celebrated at Epiphany. God makes known this transformation in Jesus' own baptism. That we celebrated last week. This, then, could hardly be a better moment for a baptism and confirmation. Jesus' arrival in our world is the moment which challenges us all – Jesus offers a new world.

Over the past weeks – perhaps months – all of you have been discovering more of what the Christian gospel means, as you have prepared for today. Paul's words in that first

reading form their own splendid framework for a course for baptism or confirmation training.

Near the beginning, the challenge is spelt out:

‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God...’

Baptism and confirmation include their own powerful drama. Whether in a pool, a river or in a font, we are drowned. That drowning takes us down into the grave with Christ, to be raised with him. Early on, fonts were holes in the floor shaped like coffins. As you came out, you cast off your old clothes and were clothed in white, the bright vision of the resurrection of Jesus. Then comes the next part of the challenge. How shall we live our lives?

Again, Paul spells it out: ‘Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think.’ That lies at the heart, for *we* do not do this, *God* is doing it. God gives the Spirit. Then at the end – almost like the Beatitudes in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels, there follows a series of virtues: ‘Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. . . . Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, pray without ceasing.’

Some, in the Orthodox tradition have taken that last line literally. Some still say the ‘Jesus Prayer’ – *Lord God have mercy upon me a sinner* continually throughout the day. All this betokens a transformed world. It outshines renamed tube stations and revitalised football teams in an infinite way. Now we are God’s messengers and after today there are seventeen more fit and in training, so in Paul’s words:

‘Be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord.’

Amen

Readings: Romans. 12. 1-13.  
Luke. 9. 18-22.