

Mr G's Little Book on

Epiphany and Easter

You thought it was simple?

Joining the Anglican Church after a long period worshipping at an independent Church can be a bit daunting at first, though I hasten to add at St. John's, there is great clarity an explanation and you never feel left out or unsure if you should now be standing kneeling or sitting. However determined to be a little more knowledgeable on the liturgical calendar, I purchased the 50 pence Church Diary. I was soon immersed in a long but fruitful journey of discovery. Forgive me if I'm repeating the obvious

Turning to say 20th January I saw that it had two titles "The Second Sunday of Epiphany" and "Septuagesima". Why was this? Eventually I realised that the Church calendar hinges around two key dates – Easter, which is moveable, and Christmas, which is fixed. Working back from Easter you have 40 days of Lent running from Ash Wednesday to Easter Saturday inclusive but not counting Sundays. Sundays are like mini Easters when fasting might be relaxed, particularly at the halfway point, Mothering Sunday. The first Sunday of Lent is termed Quadragesima (from 40

days). Working back further we get Quinquagesima Sexagesima and Septagesima even though not strictly now identifying 50 60 or 70 day periods.

On the other hand working forward from Christmas, you have twelve nights, starting on Christmas night and twelve days starting on Boxing Day, the Feast of Stephen. So Twelfth Night precedes Epiphany, which is the celebration of the visit of the Magi. In Eastern Orthodox Churches that's the "present giving" day which is a lot more logical if you think about it. Working forward from Christmas 40 days brings you to Candlemas, the celebration of the presentation of Jesus at the Temple. That's the start of the next Liturgical Year.

Now it so happens that this year (2008) Easter falls almost as early as it can – March 23rd. If you always take a holiday at Easter in Britain remember to take an extra jumper. Coming backwards from Easter and forwards from Christmas gives an unusual overlap of dates – so you get three Sundays (13th

20th and 27th) having to double up on their roles.

The only matter I didn't quite get to the bottom of was another particular aspect of 2008 – that of Epiphany falling on a Sunday. The Anglican website gives 13th January as the first Sunday of Epiphany (as does our own diary). However to clarify when Jesus's baptism should be celebrated (normally the first Sunday **after** Epiphany) it was stated in 2005 that when Epiphany fell on a Sunday the following Sunday was deemed the second Sunday of Epiphany. That then became the celebration date of the baptism. Looking at other websites, Emmanuel College Cambridge does state 13th January to be the second Sunday. So they can't both be right though everyone does agree that 13th is the correct day to celebrate Jesus's baptism. I think the resolution is that the terms “~ of Epiphany” and “~ after Epiphany” may not mean quite the same thing, but the terms are often inter-changed.

I think it's important to keep a sense of proportion. I enjoyed just researching

and learning something new.

Worldwide there seem to be at least four major branches of the Christian religion that can't agree on the most basic dates of celebration so we don't want another one at St. John's!

Easter

One cannot produce a booklet on Epiphany without some mention of Easter. In 325 CE, the Council of Nicaea established that **Easter** would be held on the first Sunday after the first Full Moon occurring on or after the vernal equinox. From that point forward, the **Easter** date depended on the ecclesiastical approximation of March 21 for the vernal equinox. So we're calculating Easter not on the actual full moon but a Church designated approximation.

There have been a number of suggested reforms for the Easter date. For example, in 1997, the World Council of Churches proposed a reform of the Easter calculation to replace an equation-based method of calculating Easter with direct astronomical observation. The reform was proposed

to be implemented in 2001, but it is not yet adopted.

Another example of a proposed reform occurred in the United Kingdom, where the *Easter Act 1928* was established to allow the Easter date to be fixed as the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April. However, this law was not implemented, although it remains on the UK Statute Law Database

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