



ECHO

20TH JANUARY 2022

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE
www.ourchurch.fr

THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a global event which has taken place annually since 1908 and in the Northern Hemisphere occurs between the Feast Days of St Peter and St Paul. (In the Southern Hemisphere this is held around the time of Pentecost). It is organised between the Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches.

In 2022, the theme for the week has been chosen by the Middle East Council of Churches based in Beirut and is based on the story of the Magi:

"We have seen his star in the East and have come to pay homage to him" (Mt 2:2)

The Magi are sometimes seen as representing the diversity of all the world's religions and cultures all coming to pay homage to the Christ-child. They all seek to recognise Him, to know and worship Him and to witness to the need for unity among His followers and to overcome injustice.

The Middle East is a region which has been riven by wars for centuries - often driven by religious extremism. Our own Nativity story is set against a background of a country invaded and enslaved under a series of cruel Roman rulers as well as the despotic King Herod who did not hesitate to order the murder of all children under 2 years old to secure his position in power.

Jewish and Christian communities alike are persecuted and are under constant threat of violence.

It is now the mission of the Church to be the star that lights the way to Christ who is the light of the world. By word and through action the Christian people are called to light the way so that Christ might be revealed, once again, to the nations. Yet divisions dim the light of Christian witness and obscure the way, preventing others from finding their way to Christ. In the week of Christian Unity, we pray to set aside differences and be united in our joint love of Christ Jesus.

On Saturday afternoon, members of the ECO Team will be taking part in a joint service with our Catholic and Protestant brothers and sisters in Carla-Bayle, and on Sunday morning, we will be holding a special Communion Service on the theme of Christian Unity. We hope you will join us.



NOT EVERYONE COMPLETELY APPROVED OF
NOAH'S CHOICE OF FILM FOR MOVIE NIGHT



The 'First' Sign of Jesus - Water Into Wine Neil Batcock

This is a photo I took a couple of years ago in one of my favourite museums, the Musée de l'Art Antique at Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône). It was referred to in my reflection for Sunday 16 January (you can look it up on the ECO website). It is from a sarcophagus, or stone coffin, so the figures are probably about 60 cm tall.

If you look at the stone carefully, you can see that it is carved from marble with cream and grey horizontal stripes. This is characteristic of Proconnesian marble, from an island in the Sea of Marmara ('Sea of Marble') not far from Constantinople, present day Istanbul.

I think this makes it highly probable that the sarcophagus was carved in Constantinople, the New Rome founded by Constantine the Great in 324AD, and the quality of the sculpture is characteristic of the workshops of the metropolis. The style of carving suggests a date in the 2nd half of the 4th century AD. It must have been shipped to Arles on order - quite a number of shipwrecks have been found in the Mediterranean containing finished sculpture from the Proconnesian islands in the Roman period, including a number of church buildings in 'kit' form!

This particular sarcophagus was clearly made for a Christian of reasonable wealth whose burial took place in the cemetery just outside Arles known as Les Alyscamps.

The cemetery mainly consists of stone tombs lining either side of the main road out of Arles. In Roman times it was forbidden to have burials or tombs within a town, so they lined the side of the main roads outside the walls. Perhaps the most famous example is the Via Appia outside Rome, but I think Les Alyscamps at Arles comes a good second. This particular sarcophagus was moved to the Archiepiscopal Palace at Arles in the 18th century, before finding its present home in the new museum in the 20th century.

There are two miracles of Jesus taking place in my photo: on the right the healing of a blind person, to its left Jesus pointing a stick at a group of jars and turning water into wine.

It has often been pointed out by art historians that in Early Christian art (ie up to the late 6th century or so) the vast majority of depictions of Jesus focus on his miracles; whereas in medieval art and later, the majority are of the Nativity and the Passion.

This focus on the miracles had a distinct impact on the way Jesus was depicted in art. Perhaps in order to 'signal' to observers that a miracle was taking place, early Christian artists very often depicted Jesus with a wand in his hand, as in this sculpture from Arles. Now, a wand has always had associations with magic, whether in Egypt of the Pharaohs or Harry Potter.



Rods (or wands?) were associated with Aaron and Moses, who of course 'came out of Egypt', and Jesus as the 'new Moses' is a well known New Testament trope. Whether miracles are different from magic is not a question I will go into here, but I would merely suggest it may not have been a problem for artists and patrons in the Early Christian period, just as Matthew's Gospel has no problem with astrologers (Magi!) appearing at the birth of Jesus.



Apart from the wand, the other thing most noted about this sculpture (and many other depictions in Early Christian art) is the appearance of Jesus.

He is shown as young, without a beard, and with long, curly hair going right over his ears.

If you look at the other figures in the photo, you can see men, some clean-shaven, with short hair of a typically Roman type. Jesus stands out by the length of his hair, and its almost effeminate curliness.

Now, it's very clear that we don't know what Jesus looked like, and the same was true of the Early Christian artists. So what were they to do when asked to produce a recognisable likeness of Jesus? Well, they fell back into using images that they had produced before.

If they wanted to show Jesus as an authority figure giving out the new law (known as the 'Tradition Legis') they would often copy images of other authoritative god-like figures such as Jupiter/Zeus; and so Jesus would appear as an older, bearded man. But when they wanted to depict the miracles of the Gospel narratives, another model was reached for: the young, beardless Bacchus/Dionysus, with his long, rather effeminate hair - and there are particular resonances with Bacchus/Dionysus in turning water into wine.

The vast majority of depictions of Jesus in Early Christian art are of this latter type. As with all religious art, it is up to us, as viewers, to see beyond the image.



TRAVEL ADVICE FROM THE BRITISH EMBASSY

Clive Billenness

Last night I attended the quarterly meeting of the British Community Committee of France, of which ECO became a member organisation last year. As usual, we were joined by a member of the staff of the British Embassy to provide updates on current matters of concern.

The first topic raised was that of British residents of France who have not yet received their new Cartes de Sejour despite applying before the deadline last year.

We were told that if you have applied and are still waiting for a card, you should carry a copy of the e-mail acknowledgement which all applicants received, as well as a copy of a utility bill or other item demonstrating residence in France during 2021. These prove your right to be in France.

With effect from 1 January 2022, new Cartes de Sejour are no longer being sent to applicants by post. You are instead required to call at the Prefecture to collect them. Applicants will be notified when their cards are ready for collection.

The issue was then raised about the stamping of passports by French Border Officers. We were assured that if your passport is stamped upon arrival (or departure) by a French officer, this in no way affects your rights to enter or leave the country if you also hold either a Carte De Sejour or just have the receipt while you are waiting for one. We were advised however to always hand your Carte de Sejour to the Border Officer on top of or before you present your passport so they are aware of your residency status before they start wielding a stamp !

We were also advised to contact the British Embassy Consular Dept in the event of difficulties.



Each year, the BCC produce a Directory of Member Organisations, which contains details of the many societies and organisations which exist for English-speakers in France, as well as contact details of important organisations such as the British Embassy.

Although this is a printed Directory, it also exists in .PDF form, and anyone is welcome to download a copy.

A link to the current copy of the Directory (which will be being updated shortly) has been placed on our website under the menu item Useful Files.

Church Mice

Karl Zorowski

