

**Father Tim**  
**9.30 Parish Eucharist**  
**Revelation 21: 1-6**  
**18<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

Mystic Meg. Remember her? Maybe, maybe not. In the 1990s in the UK Mystic Meg wasn't just a household name; it's odd to reflect now but she was a cultural phenomenon. famous for her flamboyant persona, complete with dramatic cloaks, crystal balls, and cryptic statements. She wasn't just any fortune-teller—she was *the* fortune-teller, brought into millions of living rooms every Saturday night during the National Lottery draw. Her segment was brief and vague—she might declare that the winner would be a “*man with dark hair*” or “*someone who recently bought a new pair of shoes*” Mystic Meg embodied a very particular cultural moment in Britain.

The National Lottery, launched in 1994, was a national obsession. It offered the chance for ordinary people to transform their lives overnight with unimaginable wealth. It wasn't just about the numbers—it was about hope, dreams, and the tantalizing possibility of a better future. Maybe it was tied up in the optimism of Blairite Things can only get better, the sense that the future held better possibilities than the present. This is similar to last weeks reading, the book of Revelation is describing a future: John is putting forward a vision for a new society and world. What we get is not sitting on clouds listening to Angelic harpists - what we get is a city.

What this type of writing is what theologians call ‘*eschatology*’, which literally means a word about ‘*the last things*’ ?

Traditionally ‘last things’ have been referring to death, judgment and what lies beyond this life - the destiny of individuals and the world. Which is probably why it fascinates some and makes other run out the Church door – a bit intense maybe!

If you stay with me, maybe we can bring a clearer understanding of what eschatology is and what it is not, how it helps us think about both our present existence and also eternity. What we should first of all say is that it is not mystic meg, making vague but alluring predictions about the future, or the lottery, with hopes of individualised riches beyond our wildest dreams. It is not a crude form of futurology. It is not an escape vessel – designed to take us away from the complications of everyday life ‘*things can only get better – but somewhere else*’. Eschatology does not absolve us from our need to be committed in the here and now to an ongoing vision of social transformation. It's a question of balance.

A purely future orientated eschatology leaves us with a sense that life in this city does not describe anything foundational about our existence. How we interact as a society is not just a pilgrimage to a idealized ‘*elsewhere*’ This kind of thinking can lead to a vision of utopia that has been described as the ‘*heartlessness of perfection*’.

When we read in Revelation 21 it has elements of continuity between present and future. It is a visionary weaving together of the old and the new: A new city, a new kind of “empire” overtakes the old. One not only where God is present among the people but “*where he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away*”. This is the empire of God that is seen replacing the empire of Rome. John shows the contrast: God Dwells in this new city.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out that: “*The new Jerusalem [is] the anti-image of the great city Babylon/Rome. [John] contrasts the splendour and power of the Roman Empire with that of the empire of God and Christ to encourage readers to resist the murderous power of Rome*”. The future is being held in contrast with the present - it aims to help those under oppression to seek the common good in the present, because there is a secured future of the unbroken presence of God. This positive future opens us up to every present moment to a horizon of possibility.

Whatever we do in the present is an act of commitment to seek the ultimate transformation revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the triumph over good and evil, justice over injustice and of love over hatred. The promise of the future doesn't mean we batten down the hatches in the present. Just because things are living up to the unrealistic promises we often receive, whether that is hope that the future is going to just get better and better, or if we were merely to go back to the way things were then that would solve things, the two perspectives are flawed. We know there is an ebb and flow throughout history, but we should be concerned with how Gods ultimate justice is manifested in the present. We should be concerned with the language we hear and the actions that are being taken – to hold these up to the light of scripture and who we know God to ultimately be.

Language matters – such a recent political usage of the word ‘stranger’. Christianity teaches us to receive the stranger as a gift in who we look to see the face of Christ. As we seek to have a balance between present and future, we recognise the truth of Karl Barth's words ‘*the way of the son of God, into the far country*’. The son who left his father's side to come to a world which did not know him. Those who see the son as a threat and not a gift. Fundamentally the Stranger is not a threat. We need to encounter a self beyond our self – we cannot reach our potential without encounter with the stranger. We need to encounter others who are different from us in the present as our future is inextricably linked.

As Christ crossed the border between eternity and time he came to identity with us in our humanity. I'm not advocating for a national policy on immigration – it is true that you can have too much of a good thing - but we need to keep in mind the biblical perspective that the stranger leads to good things. So let us commit to the present in the sure and certain hope of the secured future. To counter the prevailing faults of humanity and instead of fear that it will dilute us let it rather strengthen the bonds of love with each other in the present as this is our future , Amen.