

# Parish of Central Exeter

## Epiphany 1

9 January 2022

### 'Following the footsteps of the Magi'

Welcome everyone.



*Our reflections this morning have been provided by Sheila and the Intercessions by Helen. Many thanks to you both. Much of the material here comes from the Churches Together resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.*

Today our prayer inspiration comes from the churches in the Middle East – that part of the Body of Christ geographically linked to the story of the coming of the Magi. The Magi reveal to us a unity of nations as desired by God. They travel from far-off countries and from different cultures, driven by the same hunger to see and know the new-born king. This leads them to gather in the little house in Bethlehem for the simple act of giving homage and offering gifts. In our own multi-cultural society we can see some expressions of that rich variety.

Our sisters and brothers in the Middle East invite us to focus on this story anew. Uniting with them and journeying again with the Magi, may our worship today and next week allow us to come face-to-face with our God in Christ, bring a sense of joy and wonder and allow us to respond as we go on further in our own journey of faith.

Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving and joy.

#### **Call to Worship**

We come seeking Jesus  
who shines like a dazzling star;  
who lights the world's darkest corners;  
who becomes the place we can run to;  
who speaks in ways we can understand.

We come seeking the light of the world. Amen.

#### **Gathering Hymn**

'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'. Sung by the choir of Worcester College, Oxford. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXBL5nkOMJk>

## Confession

Lord.

The Magi were not discouraged by the length of their journey,  
the difficulties they knew they would face,  
or the uncertainty about what they would find.

Would we have willingly undertaken that journey in their place?

Lord may we find through you the courage  
to show to others that you are the light of the world.

## The collect for the season of Epiphany

Almighty God,  
give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness,  
and put upon us the armour of light,  
now in the time of this mortal life,  
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;  
that in the last day,  
when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty,  
to judge both the quick and the dead,  
we may rise to the life immortal;  
through him who lives and reigns  
with you and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

## A collect for this Sunday

Creator of the heavens,  
who led the Magi by a star to worship the Christ-child:  
guide and sustain us, that we may find our journey's end  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## Reading 1 Matthew 2:1-2

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the East and have come to pay him homage.'

## Reflection

In this fragile and uncertain world, we look for light. We look for the good within ourselves, but often we are so overwhelmed by our weakness that hope fails us. Our confidence rests in God, who in wisdom, enables us to hope for his mercy. We are surprised when it comes in human form: Christ is the light in our midst! God's gift to us is a 'spirit of power, and love'.

We are drawn forward on the way to this perfect light by God's Holy Spirit, not by relying on our own strength and ability.

In the midst of darkness, the star from the East penetrates the depths of the darkness that separates us from one another. The star's light continues to shine and to change the face of history. Throughout the ages, by the lives of Christ's followers, the world has come to know the hope that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. And the Risen One continues to shine, like a beacon guiding all into this perfect light and overcoming the darkness which separates us from one another.

The desire to overcome the darkness that separates us compels us to pray and work for Christian unity.

### **Prayer**

Creator of light,  
illumine our path by the light of Christ  
who moves before us and leads us.  
May he be a beacon for our pilgrimage.  
Enlighten us and dwell within us.  
Guide us to discover a manger in our hearts  
where a great light still shines.  
We thank you for the gift of that unfading Star,  
Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.  
Heal our divisions and draw us closer to the Light  
that we may find our unity in him. Amen.



### **Meditative song**

'The Lord is my Light'. This is a Taizé chant – very simple yet powerful.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFUJi7xmlnc>

### **Affirmation of Faith**

Jesus taught us to speak of hope as the coming of God's kingdom.

We believe that God is at work in our world  
turning hopeless and evil situations into good.  
We believe that goodness and justice  
will triumph in the end  
and that tyranny and oppression cannot last forever.  
One day all tears will be wiped away;  
the lamb will lie down with the lion,  
and justice will roll down like a mighty stream.

True peace and true reconciliation are not only desired,  
they are assured and guaranteed in Christ.

This is our faith.

This is our hope. (20<sup>th</sup> century South African creed. )

## Reading 2 Matthew 2:3-6

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel."

## Reflection

This reading encourages us to consider why God chooses to act in and through seemingly insignificant places and people, and what God does with them. These are not new questions – in fact they are the favourite paradoxes of preachers in the Christmas and Epiphany seasons – yet they continue to challenge us. The prophet Micah speaks directly to Bethlehem and predicts its greatness as the home of the shepherd who will defend God's people (*Micah 5:2-5a, 7-8*).

The First Letter of Peter tells people who have already begun to identify Jesus Christ with the Messiah that he is the shepherd who willingly suffers to save the flock (*1 Peter 2:21-25*). The Gospel of Luke reassures the 'little flock' of Christ's followers that they need have no fear, because God has promised them the Kingdom (*Luke 12:32-40*).

We receive these messages of consolation, directed to particular people at a particular time, in the context of our own concerns and longing for consolation. They invite us to take part in God's transformation of inequality, violence and injustice, not to wait passively for these things to happen. They call on us to be politically aware; to be locally ready to make our churches little Bethlehems where Christ can be born in generosity and hospitality; to recognise ourselves as a 'little flock', unimportant perhaps in the world's eyes, but with a value and a vocation in the great mystery of salvation.

## Prayer

Good Shepherd,  
the fragmentation of your 'little flock' grieves the Holy Spirit.  
Forgive our weak efforts and slowness in the pursuit of your will.  
Give us wise shepherds after your own heart  
who recognise the sin of division,  
and those who will lead the churches  
with righteousness and holiness, to unity in you.  
We ask you, Lord, to hear our prayer

## **The Lord's Prayer**

In memory of Archbishop Desmond Tutu who died on Boxing Day we hear (again) the Swahili version of the Lord's Prayer: Baba Yetu. Sung by the Stellenbosch University Choir.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8>

### **Intercessions**

adapted from prayers written by the Rev. Dr. Anne Morris ([www.revannemorris.co.uk](http://www.revannemorris.co.uk))

God of love,  
we celebrate your delight and love for Jesus, your Son.  
We pray that your church will show your love in all the world:  
help us not to drive away, but to welcome  
not to not condemn but to celebrate,  
not to fall into smallness of heart,  
but to speak of the height, depth and width  
of your love for all your children.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

God who speaks love,  
we pray for all whose voices we hear –  
politicians, rulers, leaders, family, friends, ourselves;  
that the words spoken may be spoken in love,  
and for the sake of love,  
even when the message is hard to bear.

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

God whose Son, Jesus,  
lived with us, full of love and compassion,  
we pray for all who are sick,  
those affected by Covid,  
those suffering mental illness,  
and those with no sense of being loved.  
In places of need,  
we ask that you will speak again those words;  
'you are my beloved: I delight in you.'

**Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have died,  
those who are facing death,  
and for families and friends  
struggling with grief.

In a moment of quiet,  
we think especially of those people  
in our hearts and minds today.

As you welcome your children home,  
in this life and in the next,  
draw them into your great love  
and give us to know that this love  
is what we live and move in now,  
and will be our own journey's end.

**Merciful God, accept these prayers  
for the sake of your son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen**

### **Worship Song**

*'As with gladness, men of old'. Sung by the St Michael's singers. Words are on the screen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNrIpDQ>



A projection of Giotto's Nativity onto the outside of the upper basilica of St Francis in Assisi, Christmas 2020.

## The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

## A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## An offertory prayer

*We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.*

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,  
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.  
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Wait for the Lord sung by St David's church choir. Words are on the screen. Thank you Nigel.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M89oWjt0Ok>





*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.*

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

### **Post Communion Collect**

Lord God, the bright splendour whom the nations seek:  
may we who with the wise men  
have been drawn by your light  
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,  
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Closing Prayer**

Gracious God:  
to all dreaming of a better world, give courage;  
to all dreaming of an end to violence, give peace;  
to all dreaming of freedom, give patience;  
to all guided by the star of compassion, give resources;  
to all guided by the fear of loss, give trust;  
to all guided by the need to be busy, give rest;  
to all led by the need to be powerful, give humility;  
to all led by the longing to draw closer to you, give encouragement;  
to all led to your table, give yourself.  
To all people, and to all creation, give your love

### **Blessing**

May the path  
that Christ walks  
to bring justice

upon the earth,  
to bring light  
to those who sit  
in darkness,  
to bring out those  
who live in bondage,  
to bring new things  
to all creation:

may this path  
run through our life.  
May we be  
the road Christ takes.

*(written by Jan L. Richardson, and posted on The Painted Prayerbook.)*

### **Closing Music**

We close with 'We three Kings'.

This is a version from Mumbai, India and is certainly different, though still recognisable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8gsGbl2FrU>



Night sky over Nablus, West Bank.