

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION 3rd January 2021
Epiphany

To prepare ourselves for our worship, we reflect on the day and on our relationships.

- *What good things have come from God today?*
- *Where have I fallen short?*
- *What will I try to do differently in future?*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Guided by a star, the Magi came to Bethlehem, found the Christ-child, and recognised him as the Saviour of the world. Now let us open our hearts and minds to encounter Christ our Saviour.

Lord Jesus, you are the Prince of peace.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

You are the radiant Light of the world.

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

You are the loving Saviour of all peoples.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by God's Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect (special prayer for today)

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**

READINGS

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 2:1-12 The Visit of the Wise Men

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 at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"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."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

REFLECTION

Tier three, tier four, what next? We are all being encouraged if not ordered to stay at home, and not to travel – unless our journey is essential. Today in Iran regional lockdowns are being applied; travel is restricted. Perhaps today's privations can give us a small taste of what the magi endured in order to get to Bethlehem. Indeed, was their journey really necessary?

In 1927, T.S. Eliot published his poem 'The Journey of the Magi' in which he emphasises the problems of the journey the wise men had to take. 'A cold coming', he calls it,

'just the worst time of the year
for a journey, and such a long journey:
the ways deep and the weather sharp,
the very dead of winter.'

It was an exhausting journey. The magi probably came from Persia (Iran) – a journey of anything from 600 to 1,600 miles. But they surely felt it was worth the effort and hardship. Travel across the desert was not uncommon, but this was a special journey; more special than a holiday; more special than a family get together. They were searching, led by God, to find the king of the Jews.

They were prepared to put their own lives on hold
 'the summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.'

to undertake a journey with 'sore-footed camels' the cursing of camel men, the 'lack of shelters' and 'cities hostile and towns unfriendly'. They needed to travel to meet the new king, as he was unlikely to come to meet them. We don't know if they were disappointed to find a baby at the end of their travels and travails, but they offered him gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then they went home, satisfied that their journey had not only been necessary, but very worthwhile.

If we are to follow the example of the wise men from the east, we must each make our own journey to God. God wants us to come to him, and we need to make some effort to understand him. So, reading the Bible, and other books, prayer and discussion with others on the journey, become part of our pilgrimage, and as precious to us as their trek was to the Magi.

God promised the Israelites, as they set off for the Promised Land, 'from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will search after him with all your heart and soul.' Thank God that he doesn't leave us search on our own, but like the father of the Prodigal Son, he comes out to greet us. And our journey of discovery is as necessary to us as theirs was to the wise men. But we are called to continue our journey, rather than to return to our old ways; a journey that we undertake, however hard it may be, in the company of and with the love, support and protection of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

**Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'.
Be with us today, as we offer ourselves to you.
Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves,
and keep us in your care. Amen**

Let us pray to the Lord who loves us and knows the terrain we travel.

We thank God for all who brought the good news of Jesus to us, and all who nourish us in our faith today. We pray that the whole people of God may work in unity and openness for the coming of God's kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We thank God that salvation is for all people, and pray for a just and accepting world where none is rejected, despised or treated with contempt.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We thank God for all who care with such thoughtfulness and practical loving for those who are vulnerable, and for those who are shielding from Covid-19, or suffering the effects of the disease. We pray for healing and wholeness, peace of mind, protection and hope.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We thank God for all who have reached the end of their earthly journey in faith, that they may be welcomed into your eternity. May we use the time left to us here as good stewards of God's gifts.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We thank God for including us in the plan of salvation, and pray that we may be made worthy of our calling

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers by Susan Sayers

At the beginning of this new year, we renew our covenant with God, committing ourselves to follow his way and obey his commands.

Eternal God,
in your faithful and enduring love
you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ.
In obedience we hear and accept your commands;
in love we seek to do your perfect will;
with joy we offer ourselves anew to you.
We are no longer our own but yours.
I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,
wherever you may place me,
in all that I do and in all that I may endure;

**when there is work for me and when there is none;
when I am troubled and when I am at peace.
Your will be done
when I am valued and when I am disregarded;
when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking;
when I have all things and when I have nothing.
I willingly offer all that I have and am
to serve you, as and where you choose.
Glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours.
May it be so for ever.
Let this covenant now made on earth
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.**

Gathering together all our prayers, we say the prayer that Jesus gave us

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen**

We give thanks for the saving death and resurrection of Jesus and ask him to be with us now

**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**

We pray God's blessing on each other

May the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with us and remain with us, and those whom we love and pray for
this day and for evermore. **Amen**

