

Parish of Central Exeter

Epiphany 1

8 January 2023

'Finding Light in Darkness'

Welcome everyone.



*Our reflections this morning have been provided by Sheila.
Many thanks.*

Preparing for worship

The light of Christ shone on the small Jewish town of Bethlehem at the Nativity and on the wider Gentile world at Epiphany and it continues to shine, often in unexpected places.

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

About The Light

It's always been about the light with you,
hasn't it, Jesus?

Magi, braving distance and desert to find you,
and bewildered shepherds, compelled by an angel's invitation,
allowed light to be their guide,

And it is still the light that calls us to you;
the light of beauty that whispers its truth
in surprising ways and places;
the light of compassion that kneels,
and washes road-soiled, life-battered feet;
the light of joy that glows
even in the darkness of grief and suffering;
the light that seeks to shine within us,
and through us into the dark corners of our world.

It's always been about the light with you, Jesus;
and it's always about the light for us.
Please lead us, now and always, out of darkness
and into your marvellous light.

Amen.

Gathering Hymn

'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>

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 Epiphany

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Reading

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² 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.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

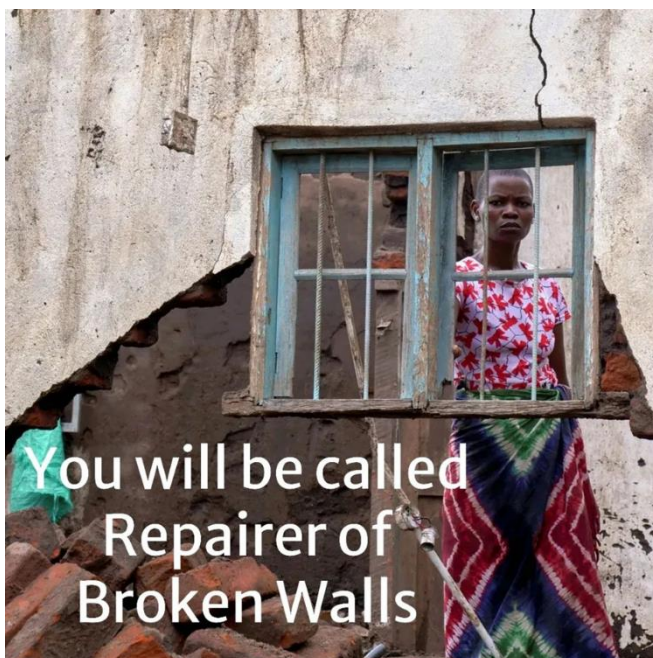
⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,^[a]
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ 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.

NRSV: © 1989, 1995 Division of Christian Education of National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

This passage is set for Epiphany and was the reading for Morning Prayer on 2 January. Steven Croft wrote the reflection focussing on the first verse and linking it to the phrase 'Lift up your hearts' at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayers. For him the phrase is 'a call to those who are cast down; an invitation to offer bruised and broken hearts to the love of God to be mended. It's an invitation to lift our attention from the perspective of earth to the perspective of heaven. It's a call to find light in the midst of darkness and hope in the midst of fear.' He then comments that the Isaiah passage is one that also looks 'forward and inward to realities of grace' and that this is a good way to start the new year. Whatever has happened in the past and where we are feeling we are encouraged to 'look upwards and outwards with hope to God's promise and to all that lies ahead.'



A young woman looks through the window of her house destroyed in Tropical Storm Ana, in Malawi, January 26, 2022. Photo by Eldson Chagara

Meditative song

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFUJi7xmInc>

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. *(20th century South African creed.)*

Reading 2

Matthew 2:1-12

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea during the time when Herod was king. After Jesus was born, some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem. ² They asked people, "Where is the child who has been born to be the king of the Jews? We saw the star that shows he was born. We saw it rise in the sky in the east and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard about this, it upset him as well as everyone else in Jerusalem. ⁴ Herod called a meeting of all the leading Jewish priests and teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah would be born. ⁵ They answered, "In the town of Bethlehem in Judea, just as the prophet wrote:

⁶ 'Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are important among the rulers of Judah.

Yes, a ruler will come from you, and that ruler will lead Israel, my people.'"

⁷ Then Herod had a private meeting with the wise men from the east. He learned from them the exact time they first saw the star. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem. He said, "Go and look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me. Then I can go worship him too."

⁹ After the wise men heard the king, they left. They saw the same star they had seen in the east, and they followed it. The star went before them until it stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰ They were very happy and excited to see the star.

¹¹ The wise men came to the house where the child was with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened the boxes of gifts they had brought for him. They gave him treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² But God warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they went home to their own country a different way. **Easy-to-Read Version (ERV) Copyright © 2006 by Bible League International**

Reflection

This is a very familiar story, but I found that Keeley Nikondeha in 'The First Advent in Palestine' gave a different slant. She wrote about the political situation. For Persia, like Judea, had come under Greek influence which had suppressed their indigenous culture and leadership. The wise men were people who could keep the memory of such culture alive and who could resist Greek and western influence. They were prepared to travel with precious gifts to offer homage or worship to a new-born king. Such action could be seen as treason. To their surprise they are led to an ordinary home not a palace. They also are guided to return by a different route and not revisit Herod who is scheming to be rid of any possible threat to his throne. Nikondeha suggests that the story is not just about foreigners who have come to worship Jesus but that the magi return home with ideas for resistance and liberation in their own country. She then gives the example of the Palestinian artist, Sliman Mansour, whose work highlights the reality of the Palestinian experience.



Camel of Hardships by Sliman Mansour.

Read about him at

[Sliman Mansour: Painting Palestine's Story — Embrace the Middle East \(embraceme.org\)](http://embraceme.org)

Intercessions

In the silences throughout these prayers, you are invited to hold up to God, either silently or aloud, the names of those you remember especially today.

Bathed in starlight, we pray together
to the One who created all things, saying,
Show us your child, O God,
**For we observed a new star at its rising
and have travelled far, bearing gifts.**

Make your wisdom in its rich variety known through all faithful people,
and give your holy church grace to bear the gifts of truth and love
to all your children on earth.

[silence]

Show us your child, O God,
For we walk together in faith.

Give your justice to the nations and their leaders,
and give your mercy to all whose decisions
affect the peace and well-being of the world.
Where we have power ourselves,
open our ears to the cries of the weak, the poor, and the needy,
and open our hearts to answer their call.

[silence]

Show us your child, O God,
For we walk together in hope.

Bless this community,
that in your light we may each become a servant, one to the other.
Bring us together in story, song, joy, and sorrow;
and let every daughter and son who comes among us
find kinship in this place.

[silence]

Show us your child, O God,
For we walk together in love.

Have mercy on those among us
who journey in sickness, fear, or any kind of trouble.
Meet them on your road with rest, peace, and good cheer.

[silence]

Show us your child, O God,
For we walk together by your side.

We remember those who have died.

[silence]

Your star goes before them. Show them your child, O God,
For they have travelled far to be with you.

Dear God, with longing and thanksgiving,
knowing that you hold this world and all its children dear in your heart,
we pray this night for the grace to receive your gifts,
to lift up our eyes and look around,
and to offer back those same gifts to you and your world, with love.

Show us your child, O God,
For we observed a new star at its rising and have travelled far, bearing gifts.

To the One who is the road on which we travel,
our companion along the way, and our journey's end,
we pray in boldness and confidence through faith in Christ Jesus,
Amen.

(written by Margaret D. McGee, and posted on In the Courtyard.)

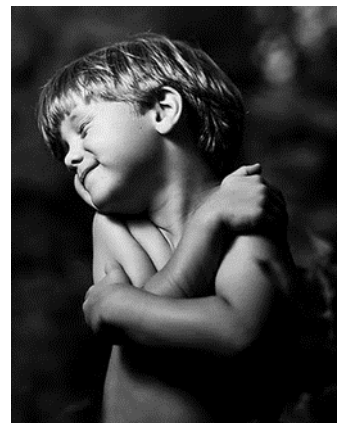
The Peace

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 the Epiphany Carol 'Arise Shine Out' sung by St David's church choir. Words are on the screen. Thank you Nigel.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Joh_liEpU7c



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 'Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning' from a BBC Songs of Praise. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5ACL94B4rM>



O Magnum Mysterium by Joel Sheesley American 2012