



Birstall and Rothley Methodist Churches



A Service for Epiphany; January 3rd 2021

This service has been prepared for use at home.

If you are able to join us online at 10:30am on Sunday,
please use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86491699343?pwd=aGJCWmdaUVBoMGg2aVpmanlLc1NLUT09>

Meeting ID: 864 9169 9343

Passcode: 155785

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Hymn StF 228

Hail to the Lord's anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free,
To take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

He comes with succour speedy
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying,
are precious in His sight.

He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth,
Love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth;
before him, on the mountains,
shall peace the herald go;
and righteousness, in fountains,
from hill to valley flow.

Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring,
all nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
to him shall prayer unceasing
and daily vows ascend,
his kingdom still increasing,
a kingdom without end.

O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious,
all-blessing, and all-blest.
The tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand forever,
his changeless name of Love.

words: James Montgomery (1771-1854)

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Everlasting God,

We celebrate your coming to our world in Jesus Christ.

Your light continues to shine in the darkness of our world.

We praise you for the way your love shone in so many lives during his ministry;
through the healing he brought to the sick,
comfort to the distressed,
promise to the poor,
and forgiveness to the lost.

Receive our worship,

and shine in our lives today.

We praise you for the light that has shone in so many lives since,
the faith you have nurtured in innumerable hearts;
new beginnings,
new purpose,
new life within them.

Receive our worship,

and shine in our lives today.

We praise you for the assurance that evil will be overcome;
that hope will replace despair,
joy comes after sorrow,
and life triumph over death –
that even the deepest darkness shall be turned to light!

Receive our worship,

and shine in our lives today.

Fill us now with the light of Christ.

May it illumine our worship and guide our footsteps,
so that we may live as a lamp for others,
to the glory of your name.

Receive our worship,

and shine in our lives today.

In his name we ask it.

Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,

this is the day which reminds us of the journey of the wise men –
their determination to greet you
which inspired them to persevere
despite difficulties and disappointments along the way.

Forgive us that we lack their sense of vision,
their willingness to undertake a pilgrimage into the unknown,
in the confidence that you will lead.

Forgive us if our response to you has lost its initial sparkle,
the flame that once burned within us now grown cold
and our hearts no longer stirred by the prospect of one day seeing you face to face.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

This is a day which reminds us of how you lead the magi on their journey,
your light always with them –
a guiding star, a sign of your presence,
a call to follow until they came to the place where the child lay.

Forgive us that we are so often closed to your guidance,
unable or unwilling to see your hand,
more concerned with our own way than yours,
reluctant to commit ourselves to anything when the final goal is not clear.

Forgive us for talking of faith as a journey
but turning instead into a comfortable destination.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we come to recommit ourselves to the journey of faith,
to follow where you would lead,
to bring you our worship
and offer ourselves in joyful service.

Receive us in all our weakness
and go with us on our way,
that we may live and work for your kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer,

for we ask it in your name.
Amen

Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

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

The Shepherds and the Magi could not have been more different: they were from different countries and spoke different languages; they had received vastly different educations; they lived different lives, and followed different religions.

The ways in which they came to Jesus were very different, too. The shepherds saw a skyful of blazing angels, and made the snap decision to head down into the local town. The Magi saw a single star, made careful calculations and diligent preparations, and spent at least a year travelling patiently to an unknown destination.

I wonder - which most resembles your path to faith?

Was it a sudden decision, made in a single moment of blinding clarity?

Or did it take longer?

Did you grow into faith?

Or was yours perhaps a more difficult journey?

Maybe you don't think that you have quite reached the destination yet, but are still on the way.

When we compare experiences of the shepherds and the Magi, we see that they were equally welcome. The shepherds found a baby in a manger, whilst the Magi found a child, in a house. Both offered their worship - and both sets of people were made equally welcome.

It doesn't matter where you've come from. It doesn't matter how long it has taken you to arrive, or how many false starts there have been along the way. You are welcome. Your prayers, your worship, your gifts and your commitment are just as valid, just as precious, as anyone else's.

Treasure that knowledge, and be confident in belonging.

That knowledge should make us quick to welcome others who come. It doesn't matter where they have come from, and it doesn't matter how long the journey has taken them, or how many false starts they have made along the way. They, too, are welcome; and maybe we shall need to "budge up" and make room for them to worship and serve alongside us.

The gifts they bring, and the service that they offer, may look quite different to ours, and we may need to learn how we belong together. But belong together we do, as we worship at the feet of the Christ-child, follow in the footsteps of the adult Jesus, and find ourselves redeemed and transformed by the risen Christ.

There is space for us all - a welcome, and a blessing.

Amen.

Hymn

StF 224

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to thy lowly bed,
there to bend the knee before
thee, whom heaven and earth adore,
so may we, with willing feet,
ever seek thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
at thy cradle rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly king.

Holy Jesus, every day
keep us in the narrow way;
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heavenly city bright
need they no created light;
thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our king.

words: William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

Prayers of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Epiphany God,
As we reflect today on how a major incident involving migrants
brings Christmas to an abrupt end,
we pray for your world.

God whose light draws travellers,
be with all who journey seeking something better
whether by camel, carload or dinghy.

God of the truth-seekers,
save us from believing we hold the only answers
and enable us to listen and learn from other perspectives.

Gift-receiving God,
help us to value the gifts of all who are part of our communities
and to remember that earnings and contribution are not the same thing.

God the refugee,
may those forced to flee in fear of their lives
find places of safety and welcome.

Epiphany God,
an encounter with you leads the wise to choose a new direction.
We pray that your manifest presence will enrich our debates, enlighten our world, and
enable us to change.

A moment of silence for your own prayers

Lord in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hymn

StF 227

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid;
star of the East, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining;
low lies his head with the beasts of the stall;
angels adore him in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all.

Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
odours of Edom and offerings divine?
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,
myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
vainly with gifts would his favour secure;
richer by far is the heart's adoration,
dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid;
star of the East, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

words: Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Blessing

May God the Father,
who led the wise men by the shining of a star
to find the Christ,
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.

Amen.