

Epiphany Sunday 2021

3rd January 2021

Happy New Year to you all!

Many of us will be happy to leave 2020 and all its anguish and pain behind us and so look to 2021 in hope that it will be a year when our world knows peace and stability, good health is the norm and all that we have learnt to value in 2020 stays with us and shapes our choices and our lives.



Sadly, we have taken the decision to stop in-person worship at All Saints and St Mary's for the foreseeable future, what follows is a short act of worship you might like to follow at home. There are some carols, 2 bible readings, a short refection and some prayers.

As you begin click [here](#) listen to 'We Three Kings'

The Collect for Epiphany 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

Old Testament reading:

Isaiah 60 NIV - 'The Glory of Zion'

60 "Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
2 See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
3 Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.
5 Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.

⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

New Testament reading

Matthew 2: 1-12 NIV – ‘The Magi Visit the Messiah’

² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

*(this is a prophecy from Micah 5:2)



Reflection:

When I look into the night sky, I am never sure quite which constellation I am looking at. The only one I recognise with certainty is the 'plough'. It's ingrained in my mind I think because as a child the latest I was out in the evening was to Brownies and it seemed to me the 'plough' was always ahead of Dad and I as we walked home!

I think it's amazing that the Magi, astrologers from the east, were so certain of what they had seen in the sky that they made a long, hard and risky journey to find the thing they believed that it signified. In the ancient world most people believed in astrology – the constant and recognisable movement of the stars represented the order of the universe – a reassuring stability in times of change. To the east of Judah was Babylon and remembering the stories about Daniel and the Kings of Babylon that we read in the autumn last year, we might assume that the formerly polytheistic wise men of the court had become monotheistic. Hence when a change appeared in the sky, the astrologers attributed it to God wanting to make something known. There were both Jewish and Gentile expectations of a ruler that would come out of Judea and the ruler would be signalled by a star.

It isn't the king signalled by the star that the wise men find in the palace in Jerusalem but Herod. As the Roman installed king of the Jews, he is unnerved by the news that a rival for power has been born. But the settings of the Magi's two encounters perfectly describe the kinds of power and kingship of the 2 kings they meet: Herod, in a palace, surrounded by courtiers, rules by force and fear, aggression and cruelty. Jesus, in a simple village home, a child with his mother, rules in vulnerability, by love and humility, and assumes his throne ultimately suffering on the cross.

What is astonishing is that the Magi recognise Jesus for who he is – they are not taken in by the surroundings, trappings or the displays of power, they see through it all. Their gifts signal that they see what this child is: Gold for a king, frankincense (an incense used by priests in the temple) because he would reconcile man and God, and myrrh an antiseptic and embalming ointment because he was born to die.

As we face a new year full of uncertainty, I wonder what will be our stability in the changing world? What will be a daily sign and reminder of God's power in creation and his constancy even when everything else is shifting? Perhaps you might wrap up warm on a clear night and go outside and look up at the stars. Psalm 8 reminds us that even though God is mighty enough to have made the stars he still cares for us.

While we cannot gather in church weekly to worship God together, I wonder if you might commit to making a personal journey to find Jesus in other places in 2021? In conversation with friends or the compassion of others, in creation maybe out on a walk or in your garden, or in reading a short passage from the bible everyday. Or it might just be 5 minutes of stillness at the beginning or end of a day in which you ask Jesus to meet with you in a simple prayer. What might your gift be to him as you encounter him in these places?

If you want to do any of these things it always good to make a plan here and now. So, while you listen to this version of in the Bleak Midwinter why not decide how you will respond?

You know wise men and women still seek him!

To listen to 'In the Bleak Mid-Winter' click [here](#)

Prayers:

Wonderful Counsellor,
give to our Queen and her government wisdom and clarity of thought in these challenging times. Guide them in all things to work for the good of all people, to restore peace and lead us with compassion and humility.

Prince of Peace,
We pray for those who are anxious and fearful, those who are ill, or who love or care for those who are ill in body or mind. Restore and heal, calm and strengthen, comfort and be with all who need your tender care. We pray especially for those health professionals who continue to work under increasing pressure and stress.

Everlasting Father,
We pray for families and those alone at this time, for children learning at home and for those returning to school. Protect those for whom either place is dangerous and be present with those who are isolated and miss the comfort of human contact.

Almighty God,
Reveal yourself to us as we search for you this year in the midst of this pandemic. Give us the reassurance of your presence, the gift of your peace and the ability to shine your light of hope wherever we are. Help us to grow in our worship of you and follow you more closely in 2021.

The Lord's prayer:

As our saviour taught us so we pray...

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus Christ this day and always,
Amen

Click [here](#) for the Archbishop of Canterbury's New Year Message