

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022

We Saw His Star in the East...

18–25 January

Introduction

The story of the Magi visiting the Holy Family in Bethlehem is one very familiar to us. Indeed, we have recently celebrated Christmas; the Feast of Incarnation and Epiphany. The Magi have sometimes been seen as a symbol of the world's diversity – different religions and cultures – that comes to pay homage to the Christ-child. The story might therefore represent the unity of all created that God desires. The Magi travel from far-off countries, and represent diverse cultures, yet they are driven by the same hunger to see and know the new-born king and are gathered into the little house in Bethlehem in the simple act of giving homage. In this we can find a metaphor for Christian unity: that is, of different Christian peoples drawn together in their common search to recognise Christ, to know him and to worship him and witnessing to wider need for unity and to overcome injustice.

This text has been chosen by the churches of the Middle East, the history of which was, and still is, characterized by conflict and strife, tainted with blood and darkened by injustice and oppression. Since the Palestinian Nakba (the exodus of Palestine's Arab population during the 1948 war) the region has seen a series of bloody wars and revolutions and the rise of Islamic extremism. The story of the Magi also contains many dark elements, most particularly Herod's despotic orders to massacre all the children around Bethlehem who were two years old or under (Matt 2:16-18). The cruelty of these narratives resonates with the long history and difficult present of the Middle East.

It was in the Middle East that the Word of God took root and bore fruit: thirty and sixty and one hundredfold. And it was from this East that the apostles set out to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Middle East has given thousands of Christian witnesses and thousands of Christian martyrs. And yet now, the very existence of the small Christian community is threatened as many are driven to seek a more secure and prosperous life elsewhere. Like the light which is the child Jesus, the light of Middle Eastern Christianity is increasingly threatened in these difficult times.

Jerusalem is a powerful symbol for Christians because it is "The City of Peace", where all humanity was saved and redeemed. But today peace is missing from the city. Even prayer in Jerusalem has become subject to political and military measures. Various parties stake their claim to it and disregard others. Jerusalem was the city of kings, indeed the city that Jesus will enter triumphantly, acclaimed as king (Lk 19:28-44). Naturally the Magi expected to find the new-born king revealed by the star in this royal city. However, the narrative tells us that, rather than being blessed by the birth of the Saviour king, the whole of Jerusalem was in tumult, much as it is today. Today, more than ever, the Middle East needs a heavenly light to accompany the people.

In this context Christians are called to seek the new-born king, the king of gentleness, peace and love. But where is the star that leads the way to him? It is the mission of the Church to be the star that lights the way to Christ who is the light of the world. By word and through action the Christian people are called to light the way so that Christ might be revealed, once again, to the nations. Yet divisions dim the light of Christian witness and obscure the way, preventing others from finding their way to Christ. Conversely, Christians united in their worship of Christ, and opening their treasures in an exchange of gifts, become a sign of the unity that God desires for all of creation.

The Covid-19 global pandemic; the economic crisis that has followed and the failure of political, economic and social structures to protect the weakest and most vulnerable; and the racism that blights our communities have underlined the global need for a light to shine in the darkness. The star that

shone in the East, (the Middle East), two thousand years ago still leads us to the manger, to where Christ was born. It draws us to where the Spirit of God is alive and active.

After encountering the Saviour and worshipping him together, the Magi return to their countries by a different way, having been warned in a dream. The communion we share in our prayer together must inspire us to return to ourselves, our churches and our world by new ways. But what does this mean in practice? Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to humankind, especially the poorest, the weakest and those marginalized. It requires from the churches transparency and accountability in dealing with the world, and with each other. This means churches need to cooperate to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displaced, to relieve the burdened, and to build a just and honest society. This is a call for churches to work together so that we can all build a good future according to God's heart, a future in which all human beings can experience life, peace, justice, and love.

Day 1

We observed his star in the East”

(Mt 2:2)

Raise us up and draw us to your perfect light

Readings

- **Psalm 139:1-10** - Your right hand shall hold me fast
- **2 Timothy 1:7-10** - This grace... has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus

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.

Hymn Verse

How brightly beams the Morning Star!

What sudden radiance from afar

Doth glad us with its shining,

Brightness of God that breaks our night

And fills the darken'd souls with light
Who long for truth were pining!
Thy Word, Jesu, only feeds us,
Rightly leads us,
Life bestowing;
Praise, oh praise such love o'erflowing.

Johann Schlegel, tr. Catherine Winkworth

Questions

Reflecting on the past year –

- **Global:** What could the role of the Church be in proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel in a world where there is so much injustice?
- **Local:** Where have you seen signs of hope in your community, especially during a time of pandemic?
- **Personal:** Where have you sought ‘the light’ in the midst of darkness?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- **Global:** Visit the website of Embrace the Middle East (<https://embraceme.org/take-action>) and see what actions you can take to be in solidarity with Christians of the Middle East.
- **Local:** Organise a candlelit vigil with the churches in your area as an act of unity for this week. It doesn't have to be in person but each church could encourage members to put a candle in their window at an agreed day and time.
- **Personal:** Take time this week to star gaze. Let your eyes settle on an unfading star and pause in reverence and prayer before the Creator of light. You don't have to go outside, you can search for and visit an online planetarium.

Day 2

Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"

(Mt 2:2)

Humble leadership breaks down walls and builds up with love

Readings

- **Jeremiah 23:1-6** - He shall reign as king and deal wisely.
- **Philippians 2:5-11** - Who... did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.

Reflection

True Leadership

Jeremiah denounces the bad leadership of the kings of Israel who divided and scattered the people, a leadership that destroyed nations and drove their citizens into exile. In contrast, the Lord promises a shepherd-king who will 'execute justice and righteousness in the land' and gather the flock as one.

Only in Christ have we seen the example of a leader truly after God's heart. In him we encounter a loving, humble servant who does not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. He comes to serve, rather than be served, and his followers are called to do the same.

Today, the Middle East is experiencing the loss of its people to exile as 'righteousness and justice' are becoming scarce commodities, not only there but throughout the world. Yet leaders, both in the world and in the Church, have a responsibility to bring together rather than to scatter or divide. The more faithfully Christians emulate the servant leadership of Christ, the more division in both the world and the Church will be overcome. As we work for righteousness, justice and peace for all, we witness humbly to the shepherd-king, and draw others into his presence.

Prayer

Just and righteous God,
we confess before you that we often covet worldly models of leadership.
Help us to seek our Lord Jesus Christ
not in the palaces of the powerful but in the humble manger.

May we emulate him in his meekness and become servants to each other in obedience to you.
We pray in the name of Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns forever in glory.
Amen.

Verse / Poem

It was the day of the strong men
the day when truth retired, redundant
because lies had more glitz,

and justice disabled, mocked,
in the name of a golden god
cast from melted down lives.

And then came the pestilence
and the day of the servant
ubiquitous, anonymous,
in nursing home and ICU,
and the temple profligate with treasure
in cylinders of breath.

Questions

- **Global:** How have you seen the Church follow Jesus' pattern of leading through service?
- **Local:** What Christian leader (either local or national) do you admire for the ability to inspire unity and a concern for justice? What qualities enable that person to lead effectively?
- **Personal:** When have you been inspired to take the lead in seeking justice or working towards unity?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Focus on a number of examples of where you consider good leadership to be evident. Try to identify the shared principles of leadership in these examples and consider how they can be encouraged in the work of creating unity.

Local: Invite a local leader to a gathering of the churches in your area to hear more about their work and to find out how you can best support and encourage them.

Personal: Find out about or refresh your memory on the circle of concern and circle of influence (<https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/the-circle-of-concern-and-influence/>) and consider how you can best exercise your personal leadership this week to help the cause of unity.

Day 3

“When king Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him”

(Mt 2:3)

The presence of Christ, turning the world upside down

Readings

- **Psalm 2:1-10** - Why do the nations conspire...?
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5** - But the Lord is faithful, he will strengthen you

Reflection

Christ's coming disturbs the ways of the world. He comes in humility, denouncing the evil of injustice and oppression that accompanies the ambition for power, wealth and status. Jesus calls for a change of heart and a transformation of life, which will bring liberation from all that dehumanises. This creates disturbance precisely because he rocks the boat of those who seek only their own interests and neglect the common good. But for those who work for peace and unity, Christ's coming brings the light of hope.

We are invited to commit ourselves to act constructively to make justice a reality, acknowledging where we have strayed from God's ways of justice and peace. Then the answer to our prayer for Christian unity becomes visible as others recognise in us Christ's presence in the world. We can bring the light of hope to those living in the darkness of political unrest, social poverty, and structural discrimination. The Good News is that God is faithful, always strengthening and protecting us, inspiring us to work for the good of others, especially the victims of oppression, hatred, violence and pain.

Prayer

Lord, you led us out of darkness to hope in Jesus.

Unite us in our commitment to establish your reign of love, justice and peace, bringing light to those living in the darkness of despair and disillusionment.

Shine your light upon us and surround us with the warmth of your love.

Lift us up to you, so that our lives may glorify you,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

Verse / Poem

In the school Nativity Play
they cast the class bully as Herod.

Inspired.

No acting required.

Jesus, you ask

which role shall I play

in my world, your world, today.

And you will me to seek first

your holy inspiration

that I might be just

myself.

Questions

- **Global:** Where have you seen the values of the Church disturbing society's values for the common good?
- **Local:** Is your church or group of churches too comfortable in a discomfoting world? How could your church or group be disturbed into more meaningful action?
- **Personal:** When have you been disturbed into doing what was right?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Covid-19 turned the world upside down and provided an opportunity to reimagine how things could be. Find out more about and get involved in the campaign to crack the crises (<https://crackthecrises.org>) and ensure this opportunity for transformation is not lost.

Local: Consider as churches together what situations of injustice or exclusion exist in your locality, work with others in your community to challenge and change the systems that need turning upside-down.

Personal: Take time today to sit in stillness and discern what injustice most disturbs your conscience, spend time praying, researching and planning how you can take action about it (if you are not already involved in doing so).

Day 4

“And you, Bethlehem... are by no means least”

(Mt 2:6)

Though small and suffering, we lack nothing

Readings

- **Micah 5:2-5a, 7-8** - From you shall come forth ... one who is to rule in Israel
- **1 Peter 2: 21-25** - Now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls
- **Luke 12:32-40** - Do not be afraid, little flock

Reflection

Today we 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. 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. 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.

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. Amen.

Magnificat

Every Sunday night, back in the day,
in Church,
there we would be, my Dad and I, chanting:
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
(Well, in William Morgan's words, more starkly.)
And then I learned
that this wasn't about people, and sustenance, and things, and capital, and nowt,
that they were just symbols, spiritual things, nice.
Is God that thick?

Questions

- **Global:** This material was being prepared as violence once more raged in Jerusalem and Gaza. How can the worldwide Christian community best support those Christians who share this contested place to be light in its darkness, transformers of fear, agents of peace?
- **Local:** How might our local churches become "Bethlehems" – places where Christ can be born, welcomed and honoured?
- **Personal:** When have you recognised the life of God growing in people and places to which you have previously paid little attention?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Visit Amos Trust (<https://www.amostrust.org>) to find out more about how to create peace with justice in the Middle East.

Local: Plan as churches together to pray for peace in the Middle East on the 24th of every month. You can use these resources from Christian Aid to aid your prayers - <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/worship/ecumenical-prayer-vigil-peace-gaza> .

Personal: Bring the fears that keep you in division from other traditions before the Good Shepherd in prayer. Meditate on the words of the Good Shepherd – 'do not be afraid, little flock.'

Day 5

“Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising”

(Mt 2:9)

Guided by the one God

Readings

- **Psalm 121** - I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?
- **Matthew 2:7-10** - Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising

Reflection

Again and again, the scriptures tell us how God walks with us. The path may not always be straight: sometimes we are led to retrace our steps, sometimes to return by a different route. But in all our journeying through life, we can be confident that God, who neither “sleeps nor slumbers”, is with us when we slip or fall.

Even in the greatest darkness, God’s light is with us. Most perfectly, in the fullness of time, God sends Jesus Christ, who is the guiding light for all nations, the glory of God in the world, the source of divine light and life.

The way ahead into unity with one another, into closer union with Christ, is not always clear. In our earnest attempts to build unity ourselves it is all too easy to lose sight of this fundamental message of the scriptures: that God does not abandon his people even in their failures and divisiveness. This is God’s message of hope for the whole world. As the story of the Magi reminds us, God guides people of all kinds, by the light of the star, to where Christ, the light of the world, is to be found.

Prayer

God our Guide,
you sent the star to lead the Magi to your only begotten Son.
Fill us with the confidence that you are walking with us.
Open our eyes to your Spirit, and encourage us in our faith,
so that we may confess that Jesus is Lord,
and worship him as the Magi did in Bethlehem.
Amen.

Hymn Verse

Hope of my heart, strength of my soul,
Guide Thou my footsteps and keep me whole;
My grace and fortress, Thou wilt be,
Oh, let Thy mighty hand ever lead me.

Barney E Warren, 1893

Questions

- **Global:** As a global community we continue to face many challenges. How do we seek God's guidance in our response to those challenges?
- **Local:** How is God guiding your Christian community at this time? Where are you being called to act?
- **Personal:** Reflect on a time when you have felt or seen God's guidance. What was that like?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Start (or continue) a conversation around your Christian community about how you are responding to the challenges of climate justice. As churches, take part in global prayer and action for climate justice (<https://www.prayandact4climate.org>).

Local: Plan a Climate Sunday service between the churches in your locality. Visit climatesunday.org for resources and inspiration.

Personal: Seek out a community to be part of to support you in your action responding to global challenges. For example if you like craft you could turn your skills into activism in community with the craftivist-collective.com.

Day 6

“They saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage”

(Mt 2:11)

Gathered in worship around the One Lord

Readings

- **Psalm 84** - How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
- **Mt 28:16-20** - When they saw him, they worshipped him.

Reflection

When the Magi from their far-away countries arrived at Bethlehem and saw the child with his mother, they worshipped him. In the presence of this revelation of God among us, eyes were cast down and knees bent. Similarly, when the disciples saw the risen Christ on the mountain in Galilee, they were amazed and troubled. Yet they worshipped him.

Do we see? Are we amazed? Are we truly worshipping? How many times do we remain blind to God's presence? How can we worship in truth if we do not really see first? In our narrow vision, too often we see only our tangled disagreements, forgetting that God's saving grace is to all, and that we share in the one Spirit who draws us into unity. Often in our pride we follow human laws and traditions, disregarding the love we are called to share as one people justified by Christ's blood.

As communities enlivened by the Holy Spirit, we are called to walk together towards the Christ-Child, offering homage as one people. The Spirit of compassion guides us to each other and only by following this guide will we be able to “worship in spirit and truth”.

Prayer

Compassionate God,

in your mercy, remove the scales from our eyes
and lead us to repent and to worship you.

In the midst of our sorrow and despite the depth of our sin,
give us the capacity to love you with all our hearts.

As we journey together with one heart and mind,
may we glorify you in the Spirit's fellowship,
and witness to those around us.

Amen.

Hymn Verse

Finish, then, Thy new creation;

Pure and spotless let us be;

Let us see Thy great salvation

Perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Charles Wesley, 1747

Questions

- **Global:** What are you doing as part of your own pattern of worship to pray for the worldwide church?
- **Local:** Within your worship as a local Christian community what are the barriers you face to greater unity and how might they be overcome?
- **Personal:** Can you remember a time when you were able to worship “in spirit and in truth”? What was it like?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Use the ecumenical prayer cycle to pray with communities across the global Church - <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/prayer-cycle>

Local: Partner with churches in your area to participate in a biblical dialogue to learn with a church community across the world. Visit Just Scripture to find out more - <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/join-in/just-scripture>

Personal: Find and join an online service from a church of a different tradition. Join in this act of worship and reflect on what riches God has shown you through this different experience of worship together.

Day 7

“Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh”

(Mt 2:11)

The search for unity

Readings

- **Hosea 6:1-6** - (v6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice)
- **Matthew 6:19-21** - (v21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also)

Reflection

The prophet Hosea is known for his cry for justice and love to override religious ritual and regulations. We are called to make a treasure of our expression of love and our work for justice and to let that be the offering that we place before the manger. We know that God does not want our riches or burnt offerings, but rather that God’s power works through our poverty: “I have no silver or gold”. The Lord desires our loving hearts, filled with mercy, truly penitent and desiring change.

Let us then prepare the gift of a heart full of love. Kneeling in worship requires hearts that are contrite for the sin that divides us and obedient to the One we serve. This obedience revives, heals and reconciles everything that is broken or wounded in us, around us, and among us as Christians.

Unity is the gift offered to us by Christ. We grow in communion as we share the graces our different traditions have received, acknowledging that the source of all our gifts is the Lord.

Prayer

God,
through your prophets
you have called us to do justice,
to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with you.
In Christ,
you have shown us what that looks like.
Through your Holy Spirit
you continually enable us
to hear your words,
to follow Christ’s example,
and to live as his disciples.
So, as we gather at the manger,
heal our wounds,
reconcile our divisions
and hold us together in your love.

Amen.

Hymn Verse

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.

Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Questions

- **Global:** Climate justice is being recognised as an expression of social justice with which churches can act together on a global scale. Why is this the case?
- **Local:** Sometimes we talk of Christian Unity being advanced more easily when local churches work together on a specific project, often one involving an expression of social justice. How have you experienced this in your local area?
- **Personal:** How do you consider the importance of church as a place for offering worship and as a place from which to call for social justice?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

- **Global:** Take time today to campaign for global justice. Visit the websites of CTBI agency partners (see <https://ctbi.org.uk/membership/>) to take part in their current campaign actions for social justice.
- **Local:** Identify projects in your local area that need more support, and work together as churches to assist them.
- **Personal:** Consider an issue of social justice that you've not been involved with previously and take time to find out more and take action.

Day 8

“They left for their own country by another road”

(Mt 2:12)

Beyond the familiar routes of separation to God's new paths

Readings

- **Psalm 16** - You show me the path of life.
- **Matthew 11:25-30** - Because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and have revealed them to infants.

Reflection

We do not know what the wise men thought – they who were experts in astronomy and navigation – when they were warned to return by another road. They may well have been very confused, but the same light that illumined their journey showed them that there was another road, another possibility. They were called to change direction.

We often find ourselves bound by our familiar ways of doing things and of seeing the world. When these ways or ‘roads’ are closed, we wonder how to proceed and continue the journey. We have to trust that the everlasting One who gave us the light, can always find a way forward when our ways and paths are blocked. A fresh start is always possible when we are willing and open to the work of the Spirit.

As churches we look to the past and find illumination, and we look to the future in search of new ways so that we can continue to shine the light of the Gospel as we journey by another way, together.

Prayer

Gracious God,
when we only know one way
and we think we must return to it,
when we think that all roads are blocked,
and we fall into despair,
we always find you there,
creating a new unexpected path before us.
If we search our maps and find no route,
nonetheless we always find you,
who lead us by a yet more excellent way,
trusting that you will always lead us back to you
and forward in unity together. Amen.

Meditative Response

Journeying on parallel paths
or often in opposite directions
We are called by 'another way'
to become pilgrim companions
the people of The Way
Compasses and maps orientated
route finding and navigating together
our backpacks not burdensome
our boots crunching on,
rediscovering ancient paths,
walking humbly together with our God.

Questions

- **Global:** What other ways of journeying together could we explore that would lead us into a better future?
- **Local:** What do we take for granted about our daily rhythms? What blessing might someone of another tradition receive from the worship in your church? How might the worship of your church be perceived by someone of another tradition?
- **Personal:** How does it feel when your familiar ways or traditions are challenged?

Go and Do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Global: Find out how communities from all over the world joined in pilgrimage for climate justice in 2021. Plan as churches together to continue the journey to a better future for the planet and for us all. Find out more at christianaid.org.uk/campaigns

Local: Organise a local pilgrimage between the churches in your area, for example, you could walk to each of the church buildings or find your nearest pilgrim route.

Personal: Journey familiar routes by another way, for example walk 50% more slowly on your errands today, what do you notice? How do you see things differently?

Order of Worship

It is recommended that a crib, featuring the visit of the Magi to the Holy Family be placed in a prominent place as a visual focus for the worship service

© Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Opening

*The clergy and other participants enter in procession while a suitable hymn is sung.*¹

Call to Worship

Leader 1 In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Congregation **Amen.**

Leader 1 Brothers and sisters, we are united today with fellow believers throughout the world as we gather to pray for the visible unity of the Church. We do this with worship resources prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches. Our theme is inspired by the visit of the Magi to the new-born King, as described in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: "We observed his star in the East, and have come to pay him homage." Let us fix our eyes on the star that was seen in the East and allow it to lead us too.

Let us come into God's presence in solidarity with all who are sick, suffering, marginalized, displaced and oppressed, knowing that our darkness can be dispelled by God's light. As we pray today for the unity of the Church, may we all journey together to meet Jesus the Saviour, the light of the world.

Glory be to you Father Almighty, for you have revealed yourself through your creation and invite all people to gather in your presence. We have seen the star of Jesus in our lives and have come to worship him just as the Magi did. We offer him ourselves today and we ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.

Congregation **Unite us as we come to worship the king, all glorious above. Amen.**

Hymn

O Worship the King.

¹ See online additional resources for suggestions

Prayer of Praise and Confession

Leader 1 We glorify you, O Lord, creator of heaven and earth, for you have set the lights in the vault of the sky. You separated light from darkness and arranged signs to mark sacred times, and days and years. You studded the firmament with stars. How majestic are your works, the heavens declare your glory and the skies proclaim the work of your hands!

Congregation We glorify you, O Lord.

Leader 2 We praise you for you did not abandon us despite our rebellion but sent your Son to brighten our darkness and be our light and our salvation. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. And the light shines in the darkness.

Congregation We praise you, O Lord.

Leader 1 We worship you, O Lord, for you accompany us in the chaos of our life through the power of your Holy Spirit. You light up our paths and give us wisdom and faith in a world of untruth and doubt.

Congregation We worship you, O Lord.

Leader 2 We thank you, O Lord, for you send us into the world to witness to this light, in our various churches and diverse cultures, and to proclaim the Good News to Jesus, the one true King, offering ourselves to him.

Congregation We thank you, O Lord.

Leader 1 May all the peoples bow before you and worship you. We have often preferred darkness, but you have given us light. Therefore, we come to you confessing our sins and saying:

Congregation We confess that we have turned from your ways.

We have harmed your good creation through our greed.

We have polluted and poisoned the air, earth and waters, destroying habitats and species.

Leader 1 Lord have mercy

Congregation Christ have mercy (or a suitable Kyrie may be sung)

Congregation We have acted selfishly towards our brothers and sisters. We have put our own needs and desires above our commitment to justice. We have built walls between us and planted seeds of mistrust.

Leader 1 Lord have mercy

Congregation Christ have mercy

Congregation We have divided people based on ethnicity and culture, discriminating instead of celebrating difference. We have waged war, claiming Jesus for our side.

Leader 1 Lord have mercy

Congregation Christ have mercy

Congregation **Forgive all these thoughts and deeds, O Lord, as we come before you in repentance.**

Leader 1 Lord have mercy

Congregation **Christ have mercy**

Leader 2 Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you have sent in the fullness of time to redeem all people, we ask you to have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and transform us into his glorious image so we can shine as a beacon of hope in our troubled world.

Leader 1 Lord have mercy

Congregation **Christ have mercy**

Leader 2 Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

Congregation **Thanks be to God, whom we praise with all our voices.**

Chant

Trisagion²

Holy God!

Holy Mighty!

Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Psalm 8 (responsively)

Leader 3 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

**Congregation Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a safe place, to
silence the enemy and the avenger.**

Leader 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the
stars that you have established;

**Congregation What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you
care for them?**

Leader 3 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with
glory and honour.

**Congregation You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have
put all things under their feet,**

Leader 3 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and
the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Congregation O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Chant

Tui Amoris Ignem³

First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

Chant

Song of Light⁴ (Saint Ephrem)

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

² A number of versions from the Eastern and Oriental traditions are suggested in the Appendix (p.20).

³ Taizé chant. A version in Arabic can be found in the online additional resources

⁴ English translation and link to a recording can be found in the online additional resources

Gospel Acclamation

(sung)

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon

(Moment of silence or hymn)

Nicene Creed

(according to the tradition of the Eastern Churches)

Congregation We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Sharing Christ's Light

A piece of dark blue cloth is hung to evoke the night sky, on which a large star is placed. Paper stars are made available for the worshippers, who are invited to come forward and add their stars to the cloth.

Leader 1 A star led the Magi to Christ. Today this star points to the presence of Christ, who has been revealed to us and whose light shines on us. As the Magi followed the star to Bethlehem, we gather under this star today, adding our own stars to the sky, uniting our own gifts and prayers for the visible unity of the Church. As we journey towards that goal, may our lives together give a luminous witness that leads others to know Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

Leader 2 With faith and confidence, we come in prayer, before God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Leader 3 The Magi came from the East to pay homage and offer special gifts from their cultures and countries. We pray today for all Christian communities around the world in their diversity of worship and tradition: Lord we ask you to preserve these treasures, particularly in areas of the world where the presence and survival of the Church is threatened by violence and oppression.

Congregation O, Lord, hear our prayer (spoken or sung)

Leader 2 The early years of the Lord's life were marked by violence and massacres at the orders of the despot Herod.
We pray for children living in places in the world where violence continues and where its results are tangible. Strengthen, O Lord, the bonds of unity and mutual love among our churches and help us to cooperate and witness to your holy Name. Inspire us to work without ceasing in order to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized. Encourage us to stand together in the face of tyranny and oppressive regimes as we seek your Kingdom among us.

Congregation O, Lord, hear our prayer

Leader 3 After the visit of the Magi, the holy family experienced migration through the wilderness and became refugees in the land of Egypt.
We pray for all the refugees and uprooted people in this world:
Equip us, Lord, to show hospitality to those driven from their homes, and grant us the spirit of welcome to those looking for a safe haven.

Congregation O, Lord, hear our prayer

Leader 2 The birth of Jesus was good news for all, gathering people from different nations and religions in worship of the holy child.

We pray for our efforts to seek harmony and dialogue with other religions:
Lord, give us humility and patience to walk with others with respect on their journey.

Congregation O, Lord, hear our prayer

Leader 3 The Magi returned to their home by a different way.
We pray for our churches in this changing world:
Lord, help us to find new and creative ways to follow you and to witness to you so
that the world may believe.

Congregation O, Lord, hear our prayer

Leader 2 When the Magi saw the holy child, they rejoiced with great joy.
Heavenly Father, fix our eyes on him so we do not lose our way. Unite us in the Lord
Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and who has taught us to pray, saying:

Congregation Our Father in heaven...

Hymn

Sending and Blessing⁵

Leader 1 Go now and live as children of light.

Congregation For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Leader 1 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

Congregation Let us wake from sleep and Christ will shine upon us.

Leader 1 Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Congregation Amen. Thanks be to God.

Parting Hymn

⁵ Based on Ephesians 5 and 6.

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Downloadable versions, including Welsh, Irish and Scots Gaelic translations, and all-age resources, from www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer.

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