

Service for Sunday 3 January 2021



Call to worship

A new year has begun.
Let us leave behind all that is past,
and walk together into the future.
Let us trust in the God of new beginnings,
and worship the God of fresh hopes.

Prayer

Lord of our journeys, help us this day to have eyes to see your leading, ears to hear your guidance, and a heart of courage, that we may journey faithfully and find your way even when the path may seem difficult and dark. Amen.

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
To that lowly manger bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heaven and earth adore;
So may we, with willing feet,
Ever seek Thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger 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.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you that you want to speak to us,
and use so many ways to do so some of which can be so completely unexpected that we don't look for them.
Thank you for what we have explored and learned today.
We cannot expect the unexpected, but help us to be open to the possibility! Help us to look out for people and situations through which you speak to us. Help us to know what you are calling us to be and to do in your name. And help us to act, to make our faith an everyday faith in which your will is done, and your kingdom comes among us. **Amen.**

Reading 1 Isaiah 60 v 1 – 6

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.

Prayer

In the familiar words of travellers, destinations and your revelations open our eyes to see you in new ways. Reveal yourself through the signs of your presence. Amen.

Reading 2 Matthew 2 v 1 - 12

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 worshipped 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.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning!

Dawn on our darkness, and lend us Thine 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, and 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.

Message

In Advent we talked about Jesus being the light of the world. In this story of an encounter with the holy family

the star light leads to the destination the visitors are looking for. Jesus was with God at the beginning of creation; creation now shows the travellers how to find the one they are seeking, by following a bright star. The star must have been a strange phenomenon but something that raised a curiosity in these people who studied the heavens. In our world we have too much light pollution to really see the heavenly realm as well as these experts. They acted on their instincts. They may have heard the prophesy from Isaiah, *'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.* They were tuned to their intuition and knowledge and got a feeling that this was worth going to explore further. They set off to see, and find out what it meant. The prophesy, shared by the sages and advisors of Herod, revealed that there was a new king born, who would rule with the love of God, rather than like a human king. This was a new crossroads for the travellers and they were overjoyed to see that their journey could be completed, as the star rose to show them their final destination and the culmination of their journey. Joy flooded through them and they were excited to follow the star to the place where the promised one was revealed to them. Jesus, the child of Bethlehem. They worshipped him. They gave his family honour and they presented their gifts. Gifts for the status of a king, the king of the universe. Earth and heaven combine in the eyes of the child. They have seen him and have been changed by the experience. They go back to their homes, filled with wonder and with the story of the journey and the destination to share with all who would listen. Jesus came to save the whole of the world; creation and humanity combined in the birth of a vulnerable child, with the love of God in his heart to share with everyone. As we are in God's hands, at the beginning of a New Year, may the journey through life that we follow, be filled with the light of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

An offering of gratitude for blessings received an awareness that throughout all the days that have gone. You have been present, Lord God. In the dark of the darkest night in the loneliness of the loneliest day in the stumbling, searching, groping of our living. You have been present, Lord Jesus; to bring light into our darkness; to bring companionship into our solitude; to bring direction into our wanderings. For that act of faith in us, for that belief in us through Jesus Christ we offer today our thanksgiving, Lord God, In thanksgiving our prayers for others. For those for whom the advent of this new year has brought no peace or joy. Lord God, may your peace descend slowly like a dove upon all lands. For those for whom there will be no new year celebrations. For those for whom anxiety and ill-health has blighted their life. Lord in silence we lay before you now the needs of those for whom especially today we wish to pray

Today of all days and in this place of all places we pray for our town and for all the churches within it; That your holy spirit may lead and direct our thinking and our being together so that our town may flourish and prosper by the preaching of your word and the doing of your will. As we

have begun the year worshipping may that spirit of harmony and togetherness, place you, Lord God, at the centre of our lives, and by placing us at the centre of yours. These we ask and pray through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen

God who sets us on a journey

to discover, dream and grow,
lead us as you led your people
in the desert long ago;
journey inward, journey outward,
stir the spirit, stretch the mind,
love for God and self and neighbour
marks the way that Christ defined.

Exploration brings new insights,
changes, choices we must face;
give us wisdom in deciding,
mindful always of your grace;
should we stumble, lose our bearings,
find it hard to know what's right,
we regain our true direction
focused on the Jesus light.

End our longing for the old days,
grant the vision that we lack –
once we've started on this journey
there can be no turning back;
let us travel light, discarding
excess baggage from our past,
cherish only what's essential,
choosing treasure that will last.

When we set up camp and settle
to avoid love's risk and pain,
you disturb complacent comfort,
pull the tent pegs up again;
keep us travelling in the knowledge
you are always at our side;
give us courage for the journey,
Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

Prayer

Lord, as we continue our journey with you this week, as we seek to live out our faith every day, be with us, surprise with your love, nudge us when you want us to see or do something new for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

Blessing

Bright morning star of God, shine in our hearts: bringing light for our darkness. Son of righteousness, warm our world: healing our wounds Holy Spirit pitch your tent among us; bringing joy to our sorrow and hope to our disappointments. God in three, transform heaven and earth: bringing new direction and possibilities. Amen.