



Heacham Parish Church



Sunday Service 9th January 2021 - Epiphany Holy Communion

The Lord be with you
and also with you

Our feet following trails of camels' hooves,
our eyes fixed on the star,
let us journey with the magi to the manger.
We gather around the Christ-child as they did,
laying before Jesus the treasures of our hearts. **Amen.**

O God, you establish the heavens and the earth,
they shine with your glory.
You gather the nations to worship,
they see the brightness of your dawn.
You call us saints and children,
our hearts rejoice in your love.
The mystery of God's love is revealed in Jesus.
We have faith in him.

Hymn: **We three kings of Orient are (HON724)**

We three kings of Orient are,
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

*O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign.

O star of wonder...

Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising all men raising,
worshipping God most high.

O star of wonder...

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

O star of wonder...

Glorious now, behold Him arise;
King and God and sacrifice.
alleluia, alleluia,
earth to heav'n replies.

O star of wonder...

Loving Jesus, we are not wise like those who came to your stable. We do not have gold, or expensive gifts.

We have not seen a star or met with a king.

But, Lord Jesus, we bring you the best of all we have,
and we ask that you will bless us, encourage us and help us to be your people in your world today, to your glory. **Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with forgiveness for all,
and God will forgive us if we confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Eternal God, we thank you for carrying us through the changes of time to the beginning of another year. Forgive us the wrong we have done in the year that is past, and help us to use the rest of our days to your glory: through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

God be gracious to us and bless us.

Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

May your ways be known on the earth, your saving power among the nations.

Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

You, Lord, have made known your salvation. Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

May God, who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour, forgive you your sins and make you holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

As we remember the Holy Family, far from home:

we thank you, Lord, for our homes and families.

As we think of the wise men, journeying so far to find you:

we give thanks that we can find you everywhere.

As we think of the gifts they laid before you:

we thank you for all the many blessings of our lives,

and we lay before you the treasure of our hearts,

that we may love you and seek to do your will. Amen.

Gloria in Excelsis

**Glory, glory to God, glory to God, glory to God in the high-est;
peace to his people on earth, peace to his people on earth. Lord
God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you,
we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Glory, glory to
God, glory to God in the highest. Peace to his people on earth,
peace to his people on earth.**

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You are seated at the right hand of the Father, receive our prayer, receive our prayer, receive our prayer. You alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord. You alone are the most high. Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory, the glory, the glory of God the Father. Amen, Amen, Amen

The Collect for Epiphany

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Hymn: As with Gladness men of old (HON 49)

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 heav'n and earth adore,
so may we with willing feet
ever seek thy mercy-seat.

As their precious gifts they laid,
at thy manger roughly made,
so may we with holy joy,
pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee our heav'nly King.

Holy Jesu, ev'ry 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 they glory hide.

In the heav'nly country 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.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to
Glory to you, O Lord

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2: 1-12 read by Suzie

At the end

This is the Gospel of the lord.

Praise to you , O Christ.

Sermon – from Penny S

I was surprised to find that the Oxford English dictionary defines Epiphany as: -

1. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)
2. A moment of sudden and great revelation or realization.

How encouraging to find this in a secular publication. I must admit I had not thought of Epiphany in those terms. The revelation and realisation bit yes, but 'to the gentiles' that really made me think and this in a gospel written primarily for the Jews!! Matthew tells us at the very beginning of his record of Jesus earthly life that God revealed his Son to gentiles, here represented by the Magi, as well as to the Jews.

There are three primary characters in this drama.

1. The Magi, representing gentiles.
2. Herod, who represented solely his own interests.
3. The chief priests, representing the Jews.

The Magi

Lots of legends have grown up around this group of people leading us to believe that there were three of them, they were kings, even to give them names, but the bible doesn't tell us any more than we read here in Matthew's gospel. We know from other reliable historical sources that there was a centuries old tribe of priests in Persia called the Magi and that they studied the movements of heavenly bodies. Now this fits well because they would have been east of Jerusalem. Notice, they were in the east not the star, so despite what some carols say they travelled westwards. A very long way westward as Persia to Jerusalem is roughly 1700km or 1000 miles. Clearly, they were wealthy and probably travelled with a sizeable caravan, big enough we are told, for their arrival in Jerusalem to trouble the whole city.

Why had they travelled so far? To find, "the one born King of the Jews and to worship him". How did they know all this from afar? This had been communicated to them using their preferred source of information, the stars. They had travelled west to Judea to find who or what the appearing of this heavenly body meant. This amazing group of people with little to go on travelled this vast distance to find out. They came prepared with gifts and to worship. They recognised Jesus as 'King of the Jews', a title which Matthew does not use again until Jesus 'Saviour of the world' is recognised after the resurrection. Their faith, insight, wholehearted search, and adoring worship are utterly amazing. One of God's surprises – a superb illustration that God meets us where we are - in this case in the study of heavenly bodies.

Was this 'star' a natural happening? Certainly, God could have used something natural, but this guiding light was unusual in that it seems to have appeared and disappeared several times and moved about locally to fulfil its function. God was at work, and anything is possible with God. Whatever it was, the Magi were led to Jesus, and they worshipped him.

Notice they were led to a house not a stable, clearly time had passed since the birth. Herod wanted to know when they first saw the 'star'. We have no idea of timing. Maybe the 'star' appeared to the Magi before the birth but clearly walking pace from Persia would have taken some while. Their gifts were 'normal' gifts to present to royalty but this king they recognised as worthy of worship. God hadn't quite finished with them. As they turned to head for home, in obedience to a dream, they went by another route and avoided Herod thus protecting the child Jesus.

Herod

Was a man with a reputation for being ruthless and jealous, paranoid that his power could be wrested from him. The city feared upsetting him lest he wreak further terrible vengeance. He knew he was not the legitimate heir to the throne in Jerusalem. Not a full Jew but an Idumean a descendent of Esau not Jacob, some claimed he had bought his 'crown' from Rome, and it was here in part that his insecurity lay. Threatened by the arrival of the legitimate heir to the throne his response was to oppose Jesus and covertly try to exterminate him.

The Jews

The chief priests and the scribes easily identified where the Messiah would be born. They quoted the prophecy of Micah, something they taught to all good Jews who eagerly awaited the arrival of their Messiah. How baffling to realise that they did not go and seek this child only 5 miles or so away and they certainly did not worship him.

Three main characters –

The Magi - gentiles who sought and worshipped Jesus.

Herod – a despot who opposed Jesus.

The Jews – who ignored their long-awaited Messiah.

May we emulate the faith, insight, wholehearted search, and adoring worship of those pioneering gentiles as we celebrate the coming into this world of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour of the world.

The Creed

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 from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. 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 and the Son, 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.

Prayers of intercession - Led by Ren

Lord, in your mercy
All: **hear our prayer.**

Gracious and loving Father, whose love for all of your children was shown in your revelation of Christ to the Magi, help us to truly understand the absolute truth, that whoever we are, we can bring all our petitions to you, and you will hear us.

Father, we pray for our village community here. Help us in our church family, to listen carefully to the concerns of the local people and to be ready to respond in every possible way to their needs. Grant us the grace and courage to be generous in our hospitality and friendship, looking out for the vulnerable and lonely and always seeking to share your love by being your love. We think of those we know who are suffering in so many ways. The sick, the grieving, who are facing death at this time, those who feel that you are far away. Help us to be all that we need to be to bring them close to you, to be the hands of Jesus, the words of Jesus, His listening ear and loving heart. We remember those individuals now.

Pause

Lord God we can only imagine how difficult it is to rule the country, make wise decisions, put aside personal ambition, and maintain true democracy. We pray for those who have to do this and ask that they might hear your quiet whisper in their ear and truly endeavour to do what is right. Grant them and their advisors wisdom and courage in the face of all the difficult problems and the abuse they get. We pray for Christians in positions of power and ask that they may know that you are with them. Enable them to follow the example given to them by Christ, setting that example in their turn.

We pray for the leaders of your church throughout the world, the Christian Church in all its numerous denominations, cultural settings, and traditions. Grant those who lead courage, integrity, honesty, and the ability to recognise and interpret the truth.

Pause

Father, the suffering of your beautiful World is staggering. The cruelty of war, starvation, disease and as always, the agony of children who do not understand and of desperate parents terrified for their families. We pray for refugees and asylum seekers and all the places in the world that need our compassion and aid. Grant us wisdom, generosity, empathy, and the love we need to meet the need where we can. We understand that we cannot pray for every situation of need in the world. But we know that there will be Christians in all those places praying often in desperation and fear, longing to hear your voice. And so, we pray for them, not knowing their names, or anything about them other than the knowledge

that they are our brothers and sisters in you and asking that they may feel the support of the worldwide church.

Pause

And Father, we bring ourselves to you. You know us all, our needs, our fears, our pain. And as we stay in your presence for a few seconds we ask you to grant each of us our own epiphany of knowing that you hear our individual pleas to you.

Pause

As we hold in our hearts and minds that person or situation we so much need you to respond to and as we place in your hands the intercessions we have made, together we say,

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER.

And at the end

Merciful Father,

All **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

Amen.

The Peace

Christ is our peace. If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. The old has passed away: behold, everything has become new.

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

Offertory Hymn:

Lord, accept your people's gift's, not gold, frankincense, or myrrh, but hearts and voices raised in praise of Jesus Christ, our light and salvation.

Amen

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Lord be with you

All: **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give thanks and praise.

..... singing the hymn of your eternal glory.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord; holy is the Lord God almighty.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord; holy is the Lord God almighty,

who was, and is, and is to come. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!

..in remembrance of me.”

Great is the mystery of faith

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

... all honour and glory are yours, now and forever. **Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come; thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All: Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in one bread.

God's holy gifts for God's holy people.

All: Jesus Christ is holy, Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Distribution of Communion – everyone is welcome to receive communion, or if you'd prefer, a blessing.

Post Communion prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

*Hymn: **Brightest and Best (HON 85)***

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 dew-drops 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 off' rings divine,
gems of the mountain,
and pearls of the ocean,
myrrh from the forest,
or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer
each humble 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.

**What shall be the star to guide me, Lord,
and what shall be my dream?**

**Speak to me as you will, so I may walk in your ways and lay the
gifts of my heart, mind and soul at your feet. Amen.**

May the humility of Christ's birth empower you,
the faithfulness of the wise men guide you,
the generosity of their gifts inspire you;
and may the light of Christ shine within you
and go before you, today and every day. And may the blessing of
Almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and those you love
now and always **Amen**

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart. (Howard Thurman)

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