



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION FOR
SUNDAY 3 JANUARY 2021 – FEAST OF EPIPHANY**

COLLECT

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Psalm 72.10-15

10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute; ♦
the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts.

11 All kings shall fall down before him; ♦
all nations shall do him service.

12 For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, ♦
the needy and those who have no helper.

13 He shall have pity on the weak and poor; ♦
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

14 He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, ♦
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

15 Long may he live;
unto him may be given gold from Sheba; ♦
may prayer be made for him continually
and may they bless him all the day long.

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Isaiah 60.1-6

1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. 5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Matt 2.1-12

1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 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." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 "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.' "

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 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." 9 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. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 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. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reflection – this week from Hannah

Here's a snippet of a terrifying prayer for you:

*put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing:*

You may recognise it- it's part of the Methodist Covenant Prayer, traditionally prayed at the start of a new year. I wonder how it feels to say those words, given the year we've just had?! Since the first lockdown in March, we may feel we've moved through all those states of being that the prayer mentions. We greet the new year having travelled a long way in some senses, yet also longing for shape and rhythm to return.

The sense of having experienced the strangest of journeys is also evoked when we celebrate the Epiphany and bring the story of the wise men into conversation with our own. They travelled across vast desert plains in pursuit of a star- they knew what guided them, but there would have been many perils along the way. Imagine the lack of landmarks as they walked day after day amongst the dunes. There were perhaps moments when they doubted that they'd made progress at all. There were perhaps moments when they looked askance at some feature on the horizon and experienced the dread that maybe they had been here before and were actually going round in circles. There were perhaps moments when they longed to see a different person, or to have a little relief from the company of each other. Sound familiar?! There are resonances of the pandemic experience there!

But, when they arrived in Jerusalem, the wise men kept their focus on the star that would lead them to Jesus. There were distracting voices (not least from Herod) that threatened to throw them off track and into danger, but they held firm. They held firm to their journey's purpose and made it to the manger.

We too have a star to follow, just as always. So, as a new year dawns, we continue to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and are guided by him in all things. Like the wise men, we gather around the Christ-child and worship, and when we do so, we recollect the true focus for our lives. Whilst our circumstances may change and keep changing, our faith endures.

So this Epiphany, as we remember the wise men, may we find comfort in our pilgrimage... but not be comfortable in it. The gifts that the wise men bring are a stark reminder that the Gospel is not sentimental and safe- it disrupts and upends human ideas about God. Gold for a king who is lying in an animal feeding trough. Frankincense for a priest whose temple is himself. Myrrh, a token of sacrifice and death, for a baby whose death will bring us life. God is our comfort and our joy, but there is no suggestion that we will therefore rest at ease. As the Methodist Covenant Prayer reminds us, this year may hold all sorts of challenges for us, but wherever they take us, we belong to God, and in God's strength, we carry on. The next bit of the prayer goes like this- maybe you'd like to make it your prayer too, for 2021:

*I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.*