

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 03/01/21 - Epiphany

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Opening affirmation from Isaiah 60: 1-6 ¹

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.**

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.

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.

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.

HYMN – HP 119 Anonymous

1. The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to Bethlehem's shepherds in fields
as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!

3. At Bethlehem they entered in
On bended knee they worshipped Him;
They offered there in His presence
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,

2. Then wise men from a country far
Looked up and saw a guiding star;
They travelled on by night and day,
To reach the place where Jesus lay.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,

4. Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
For Christ has our salvation wrought,
And with His blood mankind has bought.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,

Prayer of praise ²

Glory to the Father, the God of love, who created us;

who continually preserves and sustains us; who has loved us with an everlasting love,
and given us the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to Jesus Christ our Saviour,

who, though He was rich, yet for our sake became poor,

and was tested in every way as we are, yet without sin;

who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,

and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross;

who was raised from the dead and is alive for ever,

and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in Him;

who is seated at God's right hand in glory, and will come to be our judge.

Blessèd be God for ever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us; whose wisdom teaches us; whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think. **Blessèd be God for ever.**
To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be praise and glory for ever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession ²

Let us pray. God of mercy, hear us as we confess our sins.
For the sin that has made us slow to learn from Christ,
reluctant to follow him, and afraid to bear the cross:
Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has caused the poverty of our worship,
the formality and selfishness of our prayers,
our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace,
and our hesitating witness for Christ:
Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has led us to misuse your gifts,
evade our responsibilities,
and fail to be good stewards of your creation:
Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

For the sin that has made us unwilling to overcome evil with good,
tolerant of injustice, quick to condemn,
and selfish in sharing your love with others:
Lord, have mercy, **Lord, forgive.**

Silence

**Have mercy on me, O God, in your constant love;
in the fullness of your mercy blot out my offences.
Wash away all my guilt, and cleanse me from my sin.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Give me the joy of your help again and strengthen me with a willing spirit.**

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins,
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore to all who truly repent God's gracious word to
us is: 'Your sins are forgiven'. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Reading – Matthew 2: 1-12 ¹

¹ 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.

Talk

You don't need me to tell you the events surrounding the birth of Jesus have had extra details added to them where the Bible is unhelpfully silent. Through 1700 years of celebration of the feast of Christmas a lot of tradition has grown up, what with Victorian Christmas trees, cards and crackers and 20th century commercialism, much we assume happened in a particular way in fact did not. That is certainly true when it comes to the second set of visitors to greet Jesus, the Magi, of whom we have just heard again. By now I hope we have laid aside the idea that they arrived shortly after the shepherds. Matthew says, ‘Jesus was in the house not now lying in a cattle feeding trough and the word he uses to speak of him is not the one for a baby but for a small child. This is confirmed by Herod's decision to slaughter young boys from Bethlehem aged up to two years in his attempt to eliminate this rival. We don't know there were three of them or what transport they used, sadly no camels are mentioned. So what is left for us when all the layers are peeled back? Let's look at what the Bible actually records – there is much to learn and apply as we read again with fresh eyes and allow the Holy Spirit to touch our hearts afresh.

Here are some things to notice. Do you find the question asked by Magi on arrival in Jerusalem interesting - ‘where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?’ A few select individuals by virtue of their parents are born to become king at some future time if the line of succession runs as expected. Prince George, the eldest son of Prince William has a reasonable expectation of becoming king, but he was not born king of anyone or anywhere. Many princes have failed to become king.

Yet here Jesus, a small child, was born king already. His kingship does not rely on a path of succession. He is King from birth, in fact King before his birth. As he pointed out to Pilate during his trial ‘my kingdom is not of this world.’ He is, was and always will be King of heaven, King over all, the Sovereign Lord, the King of kings.

These visitors from the east may have had claim to royal blood but they bowed before this child and offered worship and precious gifts in his honour.

What about this curious guiding star? It is interesting to me that the Magi, the wise men, were overjoyed not on seeing the child Jesus but on seeing the star stop over the place where the child was. The Bible goes over the top to express this feeling. Matthew uses four words which literally mean, they joyed (rejoiced) with a tremendously great amount of joy. That is pretty happy then!

Whatever this natural phenomenon was that guided them something changed in it when they got to Bethlehem. Perhaps it was planetary and began to appear to the observer to move backwards as planets outside the earth's orbit are seen to do. Whatever happened, they knew their long search had come to its end, they were in the right place, the object of their quest was at hand. I am sure the overflow of rejoicing was confirmed and reinforced on meeting Jesus and his parents and learning of the unlikely situation of this child. Their symbolic gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh, which we can assume they chose in advance as they weren't the kind of thing you could pick up in the Bethlehem market, speak of Jesus' Kingship, priesthood and sacrificial death.

Finally we have here illustrated for us the range of reactions of men and women to Jesus ever since. Firstly, there is Herod who is angry, fearful, threatened and violent on hearing about Jesus' birth. He angrily rejected Jesus who did not fit in with his take on life at all. A rival disturbed his self-centred power. For Herod Jesus simply must be eliminated.

Secondly, there are the teachers of the law and chief priests who Herod consulted. They have all the knowledge, they have the information but they were indifferent to the news of Jesus' birth. They did not consider it worthwhile even to take the short 6 mile trip to Bethlehem to find out for themselves. They disdainfully assumed that these foreigners couldn't have any revelation that they themselves had not been given. They were not prepared to entertain the possibility. It wasn't worth it to find out.

Thirdly, we have the example of the wise men, the Magi, who had invested so much in finding Jesus, time, hardship, travel, preparation and observation of the signs. They acted on those signs, made the effort and experienced the joy of God at the birth of his Son and then recognised in honest, humble worship the significance of the one born as King, the one who had a special new celestial event to signal his arrival.

Which one of these examples will you follow? Is Jesus' birth, his life and teaching inconvenient, threatening to your settled position in life, threatening to your control of life, as Herod felt? Is Jesus' birth the subject of indifference, are there other more important things to distract you or to occupy you? Is Jesus' birth a source of overflowing joy, worth seeking out, worth making sacrifices to discover? Is Jesus the one to be worshipped, the one to whom you bring offerings of self, time, energy, money and service as a response in love to this act of love? Is Jesus the one born King, the King of your heart, the sovereign Lord of your life?

Let the response of the Magi, of the wise men, be your wise response too. Why not bow the knee before him whom heaven and earth adore!

Prayer of Commitment

At this time of year many of us would be sharing in the annual Covenant Service at the heart of which is an important opportunity to respond to God's love in Jesus by renewing our calling to love and service God in the whole of our lives. At the moment we are not able to do that in person and it seems right to me that we wait until we can share in those commitments together. However here is a prayer of commitment that you might want to use as part of your own prayers.

Loving, faithful and living God, we thank You for Your calling upon our lives to worship and serve You outside and inside the church. At the beginning of a new year we offer ourselves again to You committing ourselves, our energy, time and gifts to You.

(Silence)

We commit ourselves anew to worship and serve You through our living and working in the community, at home, at school, at work, in the church and wherever we are. We dedicate to You our ministries of caring, serving, making, speaking, listening, giving, teaching, organising and the many other ways in which we worship You on the Frontlines of life.

We pray that we may serve You with grace, wisdom, compassion, enthusiasm and faith - that all we are may be Yours, all we do may be for You and that Your anointing may be on us. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, that His power may equip us for our work and ministry; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMN We three kings – John H Hopkins (1820-1891)

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|---|---|
| 1. We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.
<i>O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to Thy perfect Light.</i> | 4. Myrrh is mine: its bitter perfume
Breaths a life of gathering gloom.
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in a stone-cold tomb.
<i>O star of wonder, star of night,</i> |
| 2. Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.
<i>O star of wonder, star of night,</i> | 5. Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Sounds through the earth and skies.
<i>O star of wonder, star of night,</i> |
| 3. Frankincense to offer have I.
Incense owns a Deity nigh.
Prayer and praising, voices raising,
Worship Him, God on high.
<i>O star of wonder, star of night,</i> | |

Prayer ²

Jesus, Humble King,
we remember that Your family had nowhere to stay when You were born.
Please be with people who are homeless, those who are refugees
and those who are struggling to make ends meet.
Humble King we long for Your Kingdom here, on earth as it is in heaven:
Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done.

Jesus, King of Kings,
we remember that powerful leaders visited You when You were born.
Give Your wisdom, boldness and grace to world leaders,
to politicians, business people and all those with influence.
King of Kings, establish Your Kingdom here, on earth as it is in heaven:
Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done.

Jesus, King of Peace,
we remember Herod's jealousy, lies and violence when You were born.
Bring Your peace in places of conflict, anger and hatred,
across the world and right here in our communities.
King of peace, we pray for Your Kingdom here, on earth as it is in heaven:

Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done.

Pause for your own prayers

King of Heaven, we pray for Your Kingdom here, on earth as it is in heaven:

Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN - STF 224 - William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

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| 1. 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. | 4. 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. |
| 2. As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to Thy lowly bed,
There to bend the knee before
Thee whom heaven and earth adore,
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek Thy mercy-seat. | 5. In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
Thou its sun, which goes not down.
There forever may we sing
Hallelujahs to our King. |
| 3. As they offered gifts most rare
At the 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. | |

Final Blessing³

Jesus, our King, as we continue our journey this week, as we seek to live our lives for you, may we know you are with us, surprise us with your love, nudge us when you want us to see or do something new and may the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us now and remain with us in this new year. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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³ www.rootsontheweb.com © 2020 (adapted)