

**Worship at Home – 5th January 2025 (2nd Sunday of Christmas)**  
A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Marilyn Britt.

**Introduction**

Good morning and welcome to worship at Home on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2025 - a new year. I always find Advent busy with the demands of expectation – cooking, tree, presents and sometimes it's hard to find Jesus in our hearts. But we are still in the Christmas season, but life is quieter. The visitors have gone. Today is Epiphany Sunday, and we remember the visit of the magi to the infant Jesus. We will think about stars and light so if you have an electric candle, you may like to switch it on.

**Call to worship (Collect for Epiphany)**

Eternal God, by a star you led wise men to the worship of you Son. Guide by your light the nations of the earth, that the whole world will see your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. **Amen**

**Hymn – STF 227 – Brightest and best of the sons of the morning** Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

- 1     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.
  
- 2     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.
  
- 3     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, or gold from the mine?
  
- 4     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.
  
- 5     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.

**Opening prayers**

Almighty God, beyond our words and imagining, you have drawn us together and have given us the gift of the Christ-child. You have set before us the mystery of your Word. Your glory has been revealed, your greatness, your majesty, your power, your presence with us. May this gift never be forgotten but used and treasured day by day. Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we adore you and bless your holy name. **Amen**

## **A prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness**

Eternal God, as we start this new year, we confess our failings and our shortcomings. We confess that so often we pack your challenges away with the Christmas cards and wrapping paper. We do not explore your gift enough, we do not always let it change us, but as you have promised so much to us, so we promise to try to be the people you want us to be, and to live the best life we can. **Amen**

By the birth and death of Christ we are set free, our sins are forgiven. Go in the grace of God.

**Amen**

## **Bible reading – Matthew 2:1–12**

### *The Wise Men Visit Jesus*

<sup>2</sup> Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea. After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> They asked, "Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose. Now we have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset. Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too. <sup>4</sup> So Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah was going to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied. "This is what the prophet has written. He said,

<sup>6</sup> "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are certainly not the least important among the towns of Judah.  
A ruler will come out of you.  
He will rule my people Israel like a shepherd."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the Wise Men. He found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report it to me. Then I can go and worship him too."

<sup>9</sup> After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. <sup>11</sup> The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So, they returned to their country on a different road.

## **Reflection on the reading**

The Magi or the Wise Men – and despite the hymn 'We Three Kings', we don't know how many there were, but it may have been more. We don't know their names and we only know of three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold, a gift for a King, frankincense for a Deity and myrrh to be used in death. They were observant, knowledgeable and wise and when they saw a new star in the sky had to investigate. How did they know that the star represented the Messiah? They may have been eastern astrologers who had studied ancient manuscripts from around the world, or Jews who knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's coming. They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah.

The wise men had to travel thousands of miles and had to cross deserts following the star. It would have taken time to prepare for the journey, a lot of effort, leaving their families. I wonder how they felt as they travelled – the sun was strong, there may have been robbers on the dusty tracks. Did

they wonder if they were wrong and had misunderstood the messages? This star was bright and new, and they had to keep up with it.

They arrived at Jerusalem and went to the palace – where else would a king be? They visited Herod who was very disturbed about this so-called newborn King of the Jews.

Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne of David, so many Jews hated him as a usurper. If Jesus was the heir, trouble would arise. Herod was ruthless and because of his enemies, he was suspicious that they would try and overthrow him or unite around a religious figure. We know Herod asked his chief priests and advisors to do the research and they found Micah's prophecy. The magi went on and found Jesus in Bethlehem about 5 miles away where Mary and Joseph and child Jesus had settled. Although they were tired, hungry and dirty, they knelt down before the toddler Jesus and worshipped him. Imagine grown men wealthy, respected, important kneeling before a child. It was the most natural action they could have taken – the only response which was right.

There are so many stars in the sky, but we see very few of them by comparison – partly due to light pollution. I remember a few years ago I was on a ship going to the Azores. I woke up in the night and looked out. The sky was covered with stars – it was absolutely amazing – I had never seen so many at one time. It reminded me of Genesis 1:14 And God said "let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. He also made the stars. I could only think of God sending his Son as the Light of the World and the hymn 'All Heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord.' This may be an odd choice to sing next but as we listen to the words, we remind ourselves of Jesus and his ministry, his example and love for others and for God. And it may be an odd time to mention the connection between Christmas and the season of Lent and Easter.

#### **Hymn – STF 293 – All heaven declares** Noel and Tricia Richards

1 All heaven declares  
the glory of the risen Lord.  
Who can compare  
with the beauty of the Lord?  
Forever He will be  
the Lamb upon the throne.  
I gladly bow the knee  
and worship Him alone.

2 I will proclaim  
the glory of the risen Lord.  
Who once was slain  
to reconcile us to God.  
For ever You will be  
the Lamb upon the throne.  
I gladly bow the knee  
and worship You alone.

#### **Bible reading – John 1:1–18**

This reading was written by John, son of Zebedee, brother of James and one of the apostles. John shows Jesus is fully human and fully God. Whenever I read the chapter, I have to read it slowly and take time to understand and digest what it means to me now.

Jeff will read some of the verses.

## *The Word Became a Human Being*

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him. Nothing that has been made was made without him. <sup>4</sup> Life was in him, and that life was the light for all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness. But the darkness has not overcome the light.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God. His name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came to be a witness about that light. He was a witness so that all people might believe. <sup>8</sup> John himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

That witness is John the Baptist and Jesus's cousin, and he declared that the true light would come into the world. He also makes it clear that Jesus is the light of the world because he offers this gift of eternal life to all mankind.

Let us continue from verse 14.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. And the Word was full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> John was a witness about the Word. John cried out and said, "This was the one I was talking about. I said, 'He who comes after me is more important than I am. He is more important because he existed before I was born.'" <sup>16</sup> God is full of grace. From him we have all received grace in place of the grace already given. <sup>17</sup> In the past, God gave us grace through the law of Moses. Now, grace and truth come to us through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. But the One and Only is God and is at the Father's side. The one at the Father's side has shown us what God is like.

'The Word became flesh' means becoming human. All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ this new birth changes us from the inside out rearranging our attitudes, desires and motives. Jesus is the perfect teacher and following and doing his will for us will reflect his light and shares the good news of his coming.

### **Prayers for the world, others and ourselves**

During Advent and Christmas, we light candles to dispel the darkness, and we have celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, who came in to light the world in its darkness. This light cannot be extinguished but it is a light to share with others who still live in the darkness.

#### ***Let us pray***

Generous and loving God who sent the light of the world in Jesus, we give you thanks.

We remember and pray for those living in dark places, hiding from bombs, gun fire, and the fear of war.

We pray for those living in the dark places of shop doorways, alley ways, hidden amongst dustbins and rubbish – perhaps where they feel they belong.

We pray for those being hidden from us in lorries, basements, attics and prisons. Some in fear of their lives being groomed and traded as objects. We pray for those who the authorities believe are not safe to live freely amongst us but are in prisons.

We pray for those living in despair. In poverty, hungry and cold and with little hope. We pray for those who are sick, grieving for loved ones, in care homes, hospitals, hospices and other places of care and safety.

We give thanks and pray for those who see the darkness and do what they can to help – Crisis at Christmas, Homeless Shelters, Soup Kitchen, Foodbanks and all the other ways your reflected light is shared amongst those in need.

God of light, we welcome you. We pray that your light shines continually through the darkness of this fragile world. We pray that our response will be the right one, that you will show us how; knowing you will be at our side with wisdom, strength and courage as we share your love and light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

### **Hymn – STF 224 – As with gladness men of old** William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

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|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | As with gladness men of old<br>did the guiding star behold,<br>as with joy they hailed its light,<br>leading onward, beaming bright;<br>so, most gracious Lord, may we<br>evermore be led to thee.          | 2 | As with joyful steps they sped,<br>Saviour, to thy lowly bed,<br>there to bend the knee before<br>thee whom heaven and earth adore;<br>so may we with willing feet<br>ever seek thy mercy-seat.       |
| 3 | As they offered gifts most rare<br>at thy cradle rude and bare,<br>so may we with holy joy,<br>pure and free from sin's alloy,<br>all our costliest treasures bring,<br>Christ, to thee, our heavenly King. | 4 | Holy Jesus, every day<br>keep us in the narrow way,<br>and, when earthly things are past,<br>bring our ransomed souls at last<br>where they need no star to guide,<br>where no clouds thy glory hide. |
|   | 5   |   | In the heavenly country bright<br>need they no created light;<br>thou its light, its joy, its crown,<br>thou its sun which goes not down;<br>there for ever may we sing<br>alleluias to our King.     |

### **Blessing**

As we enter a new year, may we know of your grace and love that we can share. The blessing of God the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. **Amen**

Bible readings from [New International Reader's Version \(NIRV\)](#)

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