



St. Mark's Church, Newnham

Morning Worship

Epiphany

The Gathering

Opening Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
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.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
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.
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.
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.

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

All: **Help us to pray to you in faith,
to sing your praise with gratitude,
and to listen to your word with eagerness;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Procession of the Kings

This week marks Epiphany a period where we focus on the “showing forth” or manifestation of Christ. Over the next few weeks Christ is shown forth in his miraculous actions at the Wedding at Cana, turning water into wine; at his baptism, when the spirit made manifest Jesus son of God as he was baptised in the Jordan river, and in the devotion and worship of the wise men from the east pronouncing the birth of a king.

Today we will focus on the last of these, the journeying of the wise travellers and the light that shone and led their way. As we begin to reflect on their travels and respond to the call in our first reading “Arise, shine; for your light has come” we will sing our first hymn together. During the hymn our wise travellers who have been circumnavigating the font will make their way around the church to our nativity scene (and the children will go out to Junior church.)

Hymn: We Three Kings (105)

Junior Church go out.

“Arise, Shine; for your light has come” This opening sentence of our first reading feels to me like a call to worship, to pay attention, to focus. When we do so, we lift up our eyes and look around we get to know our location, our surroundings. So often it is too easy to keep

our eyes focussed downwards on our task and to miss the light which has come. So today we begin near the beginning.

Isaiah cries out to the people of Israel to be alert, to notice the light, to attend to it. The light shines and guides the people, drawing them together. Gathering around the light. For Isaiah this light is a sign, a guiding light which guides the follower to their best selves. Enables one who embraces the light to be radiant, to thrill and rejoice and be part of the abundance and wealth God has in store.

Isaiah's light is also a prophesy. A light which will shine in the darkness and led wise men from the east to the birthplace of the messiah to worship and adore him.

Each of us are invited to embark on similar journeys. To follow the path set out for us by the light of God. First, we must notice the light, pick it out in the darkness, the one star perhaps among what appear to be many. Then we must commit to following it.

At the start of this new calendar year, I encourage you, as we confess our mistakes and wrongdoings, to seek to follow the light God has placed before you.

Confession & Absolution – Saying Sorry to God

The grace of God has dawned upon the world
through our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own.
Let us confess our sins.

Lord Jesus, illuminate the darkness in our hearts:
Lord, have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to your saving love:

Christ, have mercy.

All: **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, unstop our ears to hear your living word:

Lord, have mercy.

All: **Lord, have mercy.**

May the God of love
bring *us* back to himself,
forgive *us our* sins,
and assure *us* of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**

Travelling

Second Hymn: O Worship the Lord (103)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

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

"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."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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.' 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. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

So, the light has arisen, we've lifted up our eyes and looked around. We have set off on the journey. But where are the signposts? the map? the way markers on our route?

We often think of the journey of the wise men as short and sweet. They see the star, set off and arrive. Journeys in the Ancient Near East were not straightforward. They took a leap of faith following a star they knew very little about. They would have needed provisions, to travel across harsh terrain by foot or on camel. The road likely wound and turned, with steep ascents and perilous descents.

Similarly, the journeys of our life are unlikely to be straight roads but filled with unpredictability and uncertainty.

In finding and following our star we must ask questions. We must, as Rachel reminded last week continue to consider "What to do about the Baby?" Keep central to our path God manifest in our world as Jesus Christ. We must also keep checking our route. Asking if it is this junction or that, this fork or that. Frequently checking the light has not diverged or we've forgotten to look up.

Many journeys have diversions. Some for good reason – roadworks, impassable conditions. Others scenic detours, or simply getting lost.

In our passage from Matthew the wise men follow the star to a point but then forget to look up. They head straight to Jerusalem, because to them surely if a star appears then a king is to be born. And if a king is to be born then surely he will be born in a royal palace. They take a detour.

They meet Herod whose journey has been corrupted by the power he holds. He is filled with fear, desperation in his eyes as he hears of a new king. The wise men could have stopped here. Oh well, no new king. Or, as they did, look again and follow the star to Christ, born on earth. To the stable where the mother of all meaning, of the Christ child bore the saviour of the world.

We too can be drawn from our paths from the distractions around us. From the world around us, the assumptions we have. But if we do so we will find ourselves needing to backtrack, from the palace to the stable.

So, the light guides our journey gently, like a shepherd guides their sheep. But the journey, although full of twists of turns will still bring joy. For many people travelling and discovering new places is a privilege and a joy, so too in our lives the places God leads us will bring joy and excitement.

The wise men were prepared for their journey and for its end. They took with them provisions for the path and gifts for the King. Gifts which spoke great meaning. Gold – a gift for kings. Frankincense – an essential for worship, an expression of faith. Myrrh – incense burnt at funerals, a gift filled with foreboding and foretelling what the baby would go on to do.

We too carry on our journey provisions for the path and gifts for when we arrive. As we continue to follow the star and walk our journey, we declare the faith that sustains us.

Declaring Our Faith – The Creed

**All: I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Arriving

Third Hymn: How brightly gleams the morning star (100)

Poem: The Star by Richard Bauckham, (Tumbling into Light, 2022)

The Star

We first saw it
on a night pitch as a dungeon,
the world's midnight.
It appeared
the only brightness in the universe,
a bird of pure light soaring,
a crystal ship
sailing the dark deluge,
a dazzling denizen of heaven
leaping the vast vault
towards our long lost world.

And so we scrolled through
the pages of our predecessors,
sages and soothsayers,
farsighted seekers of signs.
We pondered prophecies
penned at twilight
when the mind scries unicorns
and ghouls lurking in trees
and doubts its destiny.

And it seemed to us for the first time
that they knew nothing
save the yearning
for the blue flower
in a starlit clearing

among moon-white trees.

Into our calendar of moons
and slow rotations
the star was a wild intruder
routing regularities
At the world's midnight it arose,
morning star of an incalculable day,
whose hours we could not reckon.

From our high hermitages,
from their wide vistas and airy aspirations,
we descended through forests,
finding a path we had never travelled,
though it felt familiar,
like the last leg of a journey home.

But there were many legs
and lengths we had to go to,
led as we were.

We moved like shadows
seeking the selves that cast them
in the light that defines them.

There were desolate spaces,
where even the camels stood
snorting at unseen evil.

We skirted murderous towns

where the rotting dead
hung in avenues of gallows.

We met the mad king,
heard his cunning words of welcome,
saw the desperation in his eyes.

In the end we arrived
where a sturdy man stood guard,
like a silver-armoured angel,
and the mother of all meaning,
girl though she was,
glowed with the love
that leapt lightly from heaven.
Here was the home for all strangers.
Here was the world's dawn.
here was the blue flower
in the sunlit clearing
among milk-white trees.

In the end we arrived. there were many legs and lengths we had to go to, but from time to time we arrive. Much like we mark today the wise men arriving to the Holy Family, we arrive at the place God has been guiding us.

In Richard's poem he writes of the wise men arriving at "the home for all strangers". It is in our arriving to be with Christ that we too find this home, this welcome as sons and daughters of God the father.

As we reflect back on our journeys to each place where we pause we may come to understand a little better. As we follow the star we are filled with uncertainty. But when we come to rest and look back

sometimes it all begins to make more sense. The Godly wisdom has been revealed and superseded the earthly wisdom we held.

In our lives God's call, the appearance of a star to follow can feel like a wild intruder. Often it will call us away from the path we had planned, it will be unpredictable. It will not conform to the secular ideas of those around us. Following a star has a different language of value, our earthly privilege, the social currency we have earned is worthless. We must trust alone in the sole guide and follow to the place God intends. By doing so we find the home for which we are longing.

As we walk this path together, following our star, and contemplating our destination, we bring before God our fears, excitement, needs and gifts in prayer.

Prayers

Prayers of Intercession

Let us worship the Saviour with joy
and make our prayer to our heavenly Father.

The magi came from the east to worship your Son:
Father, grant to Christians everywhere freedom to worship you.
Protect those who live where freedom of belief is not a given.

Grant safe passage to all those who travel.

For those travelling with a destination in mind like the wise men.
For those travelling with only leaving their place of departure in mind. We pray especially for refugees fleeing political, religious, economic, or environmental crises.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

The infant Christ received gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh:
Father, accept the offerings of our hearts and minds at the
beginning of this calendar year.

Guide our resolutions and intentions as we make them, help us
to discern the star to follow and keep true to its path.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

The kingdoms of this world will be united as your heavenly
kingdom.

Father, grant an abundance of peace to your world.

We pray for those places where peace is a distant dream and for
places where the hope of peace is lost. We pray for Ukraine,
Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ethiopia, and all places where your
people do not know peace.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

The Holy family lived in exile and in the shadow of death:

Father, look in mercy on all who are poor and powerless, and all
who suffer.

Remembering those who are struggling to heat their homes and
to eat. For those who have no work or for whom work is
intolerable.

For those who strike and those who are impacted by strikes.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Your Son shared the life of his home and family at Nazareth:

Father, protect in your love our neighbours, our families, and this community of which we are part.

Help us to shine as a light in the darkness of this world, lit by your love. Grant opportunities to share your love and courage to act for justice.

May we be your hands and your feet in our community.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Father, we rejoice in our fellowship with the shepherds, the angels, the magi, the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and all the faithful departed.

In your unfailing love for us and for all people, Merciful Father, **accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Collect:

All: **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 forever.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Travelling Onwards

The wise men lifted up their eyes and looked around. They noticed the signpost, the star, and followed it. They persevered through the twists and turns, the diversions and the hardship and they arrived at the place God had called them to, to give devotion, worship and praise to the Son of God made man among them.

But then they got up and journeyed on. They received a new direction in a dream and followed that.

In our lives we will have times when we are looking around, seeking a sign, sometimes it won't be as clear as the brightest star in the sky, although even that the wise men probably could only see at night and needed the knowledge of their ancestors to follow! But there will always be a sign.

We will have times that are on the road, travelling literally and or spiritually. When we need to keep track of the star and carry with us our provisions in faith.

We will have times when we arrive. When we need do nothing but give devotion, wonder, worship and praise to our God. When we feel at home.

And we will have times when we journey onwards. Following a new sign.

At the start of this New Year, where are you? Are you looking, travelling, worshiping and resting, or starting out anew?

As we sing our final hymn and close our worship together, where is the star you are following? Will you trust its path?

Final Hymn: Christ be our Light (42)

May God the Father,
who led the wise men by the shining of a star
to find the Christ, the Light from Light,
lead you also in your pilgrimage to find the Lord.

All: **Amen.**

All: **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.**