

## GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

### Hymn

Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.  
**And also with you.**

### Sentence

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Isaiah 60.1

### Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, who brought the nations to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising: fill the world with your glory, and show yourself to all the nations; through him who is the true light and the bright morning star, Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

#### Isaiah 60:2.1-6

<sup>1</sup> 'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. <sup>2</sup> See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

<sup>3</sup> Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup> '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.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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

#### Psalm 72 1-7, 10-14

<sup>1</sup> Give the king your judgement, O God: and your righteousness to the son of a king,

<sup>2</sup> That he may judge your people rightly: and the poor of the land with equity.

<sup>3</sup> Let the mountains be laden with peace because of his righteousness: and the hills also with prosperity for his people. <sup>4</sup> May he give justice to the poor among the people: and rescue the children of the needy and crush the oppressor. <sup>5</sup> May he live while the sun endures: and while the moon gives light, throughout all generations. <sup>6</sup> May he come down like rain upon the new-mown fields: and as showers that water the earth. <sup>7</sup> In his time shall righteousness flourish: and abundance of peace, till the moon shall be no more.

<sup>10</sup> The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring tribute: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

<sup>11</sup> All kings shall fall down before him: and all nations do him service.

<sup>12</sup> He will deliver the needy when they cry: and the poor that have no helper.

<sup>13</sup> He will pity the helpless and the needy: and save the lives of the poor.

<sup>14</sup> He will redeem them from oppression and violence: and their blood shall be precious in his sight.

#### Ephesians 3: 1-12

<sup>1</sup> For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – <sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

<sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

<sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

<sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

<sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

### Matthew 2 1-12

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> 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.' <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> "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."'

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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.'

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### Sermon

#### Nicene 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 of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

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 and THE LORD'S PRAYER

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Jesus said: Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11.28

### Invitation to Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table.

Christ the Son of God has been revealed as a light to the nations.

Let us bring our darkness to his light, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

### Confession

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

**Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us. Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### Absolution

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith:

pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

*Hymn*

### OFFERTORY

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.

Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom. **Blessed be God for ever.**

### Thanksgiving 5

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Loving God, we thank you for this world of wonder and delight.

You have given it to us to care for, so that all your creatures may enjoy its bounty.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that when we turned away from you, you sent Jesus to live and work as one of us, and bring us back to you.

He showed us how to love you and set us free to love and serve one another.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

We thank you that on the cross Jesus took away our sin, all that keeps us from each other and from you.

He frees us from hate and fear, from all that destroys love and trust.

Lord our God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

And so with everyone who believes in you, with all the saints and angels, we rejoice and praise you, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.**

And now we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine; may we who receive them, as Jesus said, share his body and his blood. On the night he was betrayed, he took bread and gave you thanks.

He broke the bread and gave it to his friends, and said, 'Take and eat. This is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper he took the cup and gave you thanks. He shared the cup with them and said, 'This is my blood poured out so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in remembrance of me.'

In obedience to this command: Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

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

**We remember his death on the cross. We proclaim the resurrection to new life. We await Christ's coming in glory. Dying, you destroyed our death. Rising, you restored our life. Christ Jesus, come in glory.**

**When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory.**

You have gathered us together to feed on Christ and to remember all he has done for us:

*The memorial acclamation may be used here*

Fill us with your Spirit  
that we may follow Jesus  
in all we do and say,  
working for justice and bringing your peace  
to this world that you have made.  
Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Blessing and honour and glory and power  
are yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

**As this broken bread was once many grains, which have been gathered together and made one bread:**

As this broken bread was once many grains,  
which have been gathered together and made one bread:

**so may your Church be gathered  
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.**

**The gifts of God for the people of God 1**

The gifts of God for the people of God.  
Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us,  
and feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

**The body of our Lord Jesus Christ**

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul to everlasting life.

God of the nations, we thank you for nourishing us with this holy sacrament.

Guide us by your presence, that we may bring your light to those who dwell in darkness, and establish your justice in the earth.

**Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.**

*Hymn*

Blessing

May Christ the Son of God be manifest to you, that your lives may be a light to the world;  
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

**Dismissal**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen**

## **Isaiah 60.1-6**

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## **Psalm 72.1-7, 72.10-14**

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and your righteousness to the son of a king,

<sup>2</sup> That he may judge your people rightly: and the poor of the land with equity.

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and rescue the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor.

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and while the moon gives light, throughout all generations.

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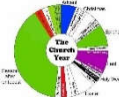
<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

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Epiphany was celebrated while I was away but I really wanted to finish the Christmas story with you and set the scene for this season of Epiphany so I am cheating just a tiny bit.

If you remember our Christian calendar starts the year with Advent, up to Christmas, then after the Christmas season is over at Epiphany, we celebrate Epiphany until Lent. During the season of we use green as our liturgical colour.

'Epiphaneia' means shining forth, manifestation or revelation. After 1600 years of history, in our lifetime, Western Churches have caught up with the Eastern churches' emphasis on this season. We have always emphasised Christmas and treated the arrival of the wise men as a supplementary story in that season. There is a whole other season after Christmas, after the Christmas tree has come down, to explore the meaning of Christ's coming.



The season of Epiphany begins with a star and ends with Jesus' transfiguration on a mountain. Here we see the starry host and the high places of pagan worship put on notice, with every sacred order of ancient near Eastern Cosmology shown where the real sacred lies. Hence not only the tame star in today gospel, but in our Psalm, we also have the sun and moon subject to him, plus the watering of the earth which was considered the job of Baal and the whole realm of oceans and distant pagan places, and everything else, all come under the power of our God.

There was a long tradition associating the Messiah and star. The star thus forms a common ground, binding together pagan astronomers and Jewish biblical promises. The star of Epiphany is a bad omen for Herod. History's tide is turning. The announcement made by gentiles and triggers the conflict of the kingdoms of earth against the kingdom of heaven, which dominates Matthew's gospel.



In those days, people, particularly in countries to the East of Palestine, had developed the study of the stars and the planets to a fine art. They believed that the whole world was of a piece; everything was interconnected, and when something important was happening on earth you could expect to see it reflected among in the heavens. Therefore, a remarkable event among the stars and planets must mean, they thought, a remarkable event on earth. So, when thoughtful astronomers or astrologers (the two went together in those days) noticed strange events in the heavens, they would search out their earthly cause. God can use people's search for the truth, even when mistaken, to lead them to the truth.





The wise men's question to Herod and Herod's question to the teachers of the law was 'where would the baby be born?' What is Matthew wanting us to see? The prophecy in Micah, which we read a week or so before Christmas and is what these teachers of the law found to answer Herod, said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem but as an adult Jesus was known as a Nazarene, so people thought he couldn't be the Messiah.

The arrival of the Magi introduces us to something which Matthew wants us to be clear about from the start. Jesus being the king of the Jews doesn't mean that he is king of only the Jews. At the heart of many prophecies about the Messiah, were predictions that his rule would bring God's justice and peace to the whole world, so here, even when Jesus is an apparently unknown baby, there is a sign of what is to come. The wise men come as pagans, who though they do not have the special revelation of the torah, come to Jerusalem following the light they have seen.



These men are often depicted as kings but nowhere in our reading does it say that; they were scholars, and wealthy and thus able to travel, and the only reason we think there were three of them is because of the three gifts but there might have been any number. They also started their journey when Jesus was born and travelled a long way, so arrived in Bethlehem years after Jesus' birth, when the census was long over, and the family were living in a house. These details are not important, but it is important to notice that they came seeking the true king.

The gifts the wise men brought, besides being a fulfilment of the prophecy, were the sort of things people in the ancient world would think of as appropriate to bring to kings or even gods. Gold is obviously suitable, but frankincense and myrrh are expensive aromatic gum resins, not native to Palestine, with a variety of religious and medical connotations. There is no evidence that Matthew was thinking in terms of Gold for kingship, frankincense for divinity and myrrh for death but many people have seen it as prophetic.



Have you even noticed that in this story God is never actually mentioned? We don't notice as we read it as his fingerprints are all over it. Like the star motif, the dream portrays God, as being active unobtrusively but unambiguously behind the scenes. The story shows that, although Jesus comes as the Jewish Messiah, the advent of Christ is the fulfillment of Gentile hopes as well. Even those who do not have the bible and the tradition to know what they are looking for are still in quest of authentic life and human community.





We should not minimize the wise men's actions, for they did not simply admire or study the star but followed it even to the point of resisting the enthroned powers. Yet their action is a response to the divine initiative, here, as always, God's grace proceeds human action.

Even if in this day and age some people might be dubious that God would divert a star, no one with any faith doubts God's ability to realign human hearts. The wise men perfectly illustrate the impact of Christ's epiphany on the nations, as they return to their own country by another road.



This choice of another road for humanity is also Paul's theme in Ephesians, with its emerging theology of a universal Church embodying God's mission to all nations, fulfilling Israel's calling.

Paul picks up this theme saying: <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Although Paul came to Christ late, not during Jesus' lifetime but later on the road to Damascus, he fully embraced his mission and never took for granted the grace that had been given to him: <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things

As we live our lives, following our Lord Jesus, it is of no account how we got there. It doesn't matter if we came to Him through being brought to church by our parents, an evangelist, or because we were seeking the truth in our own way, the truth is the Jesus revealed himself to us. What matters is that we continue to follow him and live our lives giving our all for his kingdom. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.



PSALM 72:19

**LET THE WHOLE EARTH  
BE FILLED WITH HIS GLORY.  
AMEN AND AMEN.**

In our reading today, at the beginning of Matthew's gospel we see the mission to all nations, which will also close the gospel. Matthew is saying: listen to the whole story: Think about what it meant for Jesus to be the true king of the Jews. And then - come to him, by whatever route you can, and with the best gift you can find.