

St John's Church, Kingston Park

Sunday Worship, 2nd January 2022

(If you are worshipping with others, words for all to say together are in **bold type**.)

Happy New Year, and welcome to our worship today. At St John's this morning, members of the church family from the oldest to the youngest are meeting together for an all-age service, and we're glad that you can join us in this way. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah told God's people:

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.
³ Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn. '

Isaiah 60:1-3 (NIV)

Isaiah was giving a message from God – a message that said that people from many nations would come seeking God and wanting to worship him. Today, we're thinking about some people who travelled from another country searching for Jesus – looking for God who came to us as a human being in that baby who was born in Bethlehem. But we too are coming to worship God and meet him through Jesus, so as we gather, let's say these words together.

People of God, your Lord is here! **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

People of God, both old and young: **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

People of God, wherever you come from: **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

People of God, whoever you are: **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

If the world seems bright and it's all going well: **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

If your days seem dark and you're looking for hope: **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

People of God, your Lord is here! **Arise, shine, for your light has come.**

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are here. Thank you that you came to be with us when you were born in Bethlehem – God with us. Thank you that we know you are still with us now, here, in this place and this moment, because you promised that you'd never leave us, and that you'd be with us whenever we meet in your name. Lord, help us to meet with you and to worship you today. **Amen.**

Song: We Three Kings

We're still celebrating Christmas, and our first song is a well known carol that tells us about the gifts that the Wise Men brought to the baby Jesus, and the star that guided them to him. (This can be found on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5vfDJ0hshk>)

We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

*O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never
over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising all men raising,
worship Him God on high.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Heaven sings "Alleluia!"
"Alleluia!" the earth replies. (John H. Hopkins)

A prayer for today

Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's end
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Setting the Scene

Have you been on a journey recently? Maybe you haven't been very far for a while – people haven't been travelling as much in the last year or so. If you're going on a journey, especially if it's to somewhere new, how do you know how to get to where you're going?

If you're going by car, you might have a Satnav. You just put in the destination, and it tells you how to get there, and gives you instructions as you go along. It tells you to take the next exit from the



motorway, or take the next turning on the right. Or you might prefer a road atlas – a big book with maps of the whole country - or perhaps you've got a map app on your phone. If you're going by train or bus, you might need a route map, and timetables. There's a lot of planning involved in going on a long journey. And if you get lost, or the satnav has steered you into a field, you might need to look for a signpost, or maybe ask somebody where you are and which way you need to go.

We've just sung about the Wise Men on their journey. They travelled a very long way – hundreds of miles at the very least. And they didn't have cars or trains or aeroplanes; they might have ridden horses or even camels. It would have taken them weeks or even months to get to Jerusalem from their own country. And they didn't know exactly where they would find the new king that they were looking for. But God gave them some special help. The story is in today's Bible reading.

Bible Reading: Matthew 2: 1- 12 (NIV)

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.

Reflection

Who were these travellers who came to see Jesus, the new-born King? The carol we sang says, 'We three Kings of Orient are.' Actually, the Bible doesn't say they were kings; it calls them Magi, or as we sometimes say, Wise Men. Today, when something important is happening in the country, as we've seen with COVID, the Prime Minister and the government may call in experts to give them advice. Well, the Magi were the 'experts' of their day. They would advise the rulers. They were like the government's scientific advisors – though science was a bit different in their day! They studied things like astronomy – the stars – and the meaning of dreams. In those days, people believed that when something important happened on earth – like a mighty new King being born – then there might be a sign of it in the stars. So when our Magi were studying the night sky, and they saw a new star, they'd have asked themselves, 'What does it mean?' And they'd have worked it out, according to their way of thinking. A new king, in Judea – and one who was so important that they wanted to go to see him, and take him gifts.

So off they went. We don't know where they lived, but it was probably in an area that's now Iran, or Iraq, or maybe even Saudi Arabia or Yemen. So it was a long, long way, and in those days you made long journeys quite slowly, with a big group of travellers and guards to keep you safe. But eventually, after many weeks or months, they came to Jerusalem, the capital city. But when they asked where they'd find the new king, they got some odd reactions. A new king? There wasn't a new king! There was King Herod, though, and when he heard that there were people asking about a new king being born, he wasn't happy at all. After all, *he* was the king, and he didn't want another one! So he called for his own advisors, who were people who knew the Scriptures and the prophecies about the Messiah - the special King that God was going to send. He asked them, 'Where will Messiah be born?' And they told him, 'In Bethlehem, the little village five or six miles south of here that's mentioned by the prophet Micah.' Well, Herod thought of a plan, and then he called the Magi to a secret meeting. He asked them about the star they'd seen, and then he told them to find the baby and let him know where the new king was, so that he could go and pay his respects too. But he didn't really want to go and worship Jesus at all: he wanted to get rid of Jesus!

So the Magi went on their way, and as they set off for Bethlehem, they were really happy because they saw the star again. It seemed to be leading them, and when they arrived in the right place, it seemed to stop right overhead. That may seem like an odd way for a star to behave, but God's in charge of the stars, and if he wants to arrange for one in just the right place at the right time, he can. The wise men went into the house where Mary and Joseph and the little boy were staying, and there he was: Jesus, and Mary looking after him. They just knew that he wasn't an ordinary baby: he was the king that they'd been searching for. Matthew says that they fell down and worshipped him. In the countries where Magi lived, when you met a king, you didn't just give a little bow or curtsy, you had to go right down on your face in front of them, and that's what they did. Then they gave him the gifts they'd brought, gold and valuable spices, which were the kind of gifts you'd give to a king, or even to God.

Do you remember the words we had right at the start of the service? Isaiah said, 'Nations will come to your light.' The Magi weren't part of the Jewish people: they were Gentiles, people from another nation, and they'd come from a foreign country far away. But they came and worshipped this very young child and acknowledged him as a king. And they came because God led them there. They were the first people from the wider world to see Jesus, the king that God had sent. You see, Jesus didn't just come for the people he lived with: he came for the whole world, to draw the whole world to God. So it doesn't matter who you are, or where you come from, or what faith you grew up in - Jesus

came for you, and he invites you to meet him. It doesn't matter what job you do, or what family you have, or whether you think you're good enough – Jesus came for you, and he invites you to meet him, and to know him as your king.

Why do you think God gave the Wise Men a star to guide them? Perhaps it was because it was something that would be important to them. That star was like an invitation from God. It meant something to them, so they took notice of it, and it led them to Jesus.

I don't know anyone today who's been led to Jesus by a star. But God knows each one of us, and he speaks to us in all sorts of different ways, because we aren't all exactly the same. He spoke to me when I was a child, through a Holiday Club leader who explained about knowing Jesus in a way that I could understand – that was God's invitation to me to come and meet Jesus. Sometimes he speaks to us through the Bible, or through something we hear in church, or something a friend says. Sometimes he speaks to us through nature – when we look at something amazing or beautiful, and think, 'How marvellous God must be to make that'. Sometimes we can be aware of God coming to meet us when we pray. One lady was sitting on a bus worrying about all the people she had to take care of, when she saw an advert on another bus that said 'Try Praying'. She thought, 'It'll take more than that to make me pray!' But then her bus stopped opposite a church, and the church had a banner outside that said, 'Try Praying'. So she started to think something was going on! She did try praying, and asked God for help, and her problems started to be sorted out. Or sometimes, someone's drawn to Jesus because someone shows them God's love – because someone is kind, or welcoming, or takes time to be their friend. So maybe you can be like that star, and someone will see something of Jesus in your life, and want to find him for themselves.

Song: Adore

The next song is one of the newer Christmas worship songs, called 'Adore'. It's a lovely song, so do listen on Youtube if you can, and join in if you'd like to. If not, the words would make a good prayer to say – especially the verses.

You stepped down from heaven, humbly You came
God of all creation, here with us
In a starlit manger, Emmanuel
Light of the world, here to save

*Adore, come let us adore
Oh come let us adore Him
The Lord, worship Christ the Lord
Let all that is within us adore*

Wise men bring their treasures, shepherds bow low
Angel voices sing of peace on earth
What have I to offer to heaven's King?
I will bring my life, my love, my all

Adore, come let us adore...

Angels sing, praises ring
To the newborn King
Peace on earth, here with us
Joy awakening
At Your feet, we fall
Angels sing, praises ring
To the newborn King
Peace on earth, here with us
Joy awakening
At Your feet, we fall

Adore, come let us adore...

(Graham Kendrick & Martin Chalk)

In our prayers for other people and for ourselves, we're going to use some words from our first carol, as we ask God to lead us to Jesus, the Light of the World.

Prayers (written by Nina Lloyd-Hirst)

The response for our prayers is:

Star of wonder, star of night: **guide us to the perfect light**

Heavenly Father, the wise men followed a star. It led them to Jesus. We pray for our church and for the church throughout the world. May we be like that star and point people to Jesus.

Star of wonder, star of night: **guide us to the perfect light**

Heavenly Father, when the wise men saw Jesus, they worshipped him and gave him their gifts. We pray for leaders of the world. We pray for an equal sharing of the world's resources. We pray that everyone may have the opportunity to use and develop their gifts.

Star of wonder, star of night: **guide us to the perfect light**

Heavenly Father, Jesus grew up knowing the love of an earthly family. Thank you for our families. We pray for those who are alone. We pray for refugees. Thank you for all those people who try to help those in need.

Star of wonder, star of night: **guide us to the perfect light**

Heavenly Father, Jesus came to bring healing to a broken world. We pray for all those who are unwell at this time and for those who look after them. We pray too for all those who are sad at this time. May the light of Jesus bring them healing and wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

Star of wonder, star of night: **guide us to the perfect light**

The Lord's Prayer

**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**

Song: Day After Day (Let the Son Shine)

Our final song is one that was written for children, but it has something important to say to people of all ages, about keeping close to Jesus and letting his light be seen in our lives. (This can be found on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KtmNLFsrbc>)

Day after day,
I turn to the Light who guides my way,
I turn to Jesus,
and let the Son shine in my life.
Then late at night,
I turn to the comfort of his light,
I turn to Jesus,
and let the Son shine in my life.

People should see
the Light of the world shines on in me:
I turn to Jesus,
and let the Son shine in my life.
So clear and bright,
Oh I want to shine with Jesus' light:
I turn to Jesus,
and let the Son shine in my life.

*I'll let the Son shine in all of my life,
let there be no more darkness,
I'll let the Son shine in all of my life,
let there be no more fear;
Jesus said, "Come follow me,
I am the Light, for you to see."
I'll let the Son shine in all of my life,
let him shine.*

I'll let the Son shine in all of my life...

(Trevor Ranger)

Blessing

Lord, we have thought about the wise men coming to you, and we too have come to meet you. Thank you that when our special time for worship ends, we don't have to leave you, and you won't ever leave us. Please help us this week to know that you are always with us, and to let your light shine through us wherever we go. And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and with those we love, today and always. **Amen.**

Worship prepared by Julie Horton. Prayers of intercession by Nina Lloyd-Hirst.

'We Three Kings' by John Henry Hopkins (1820 – 1891)

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