



Thursday Prayers for Epiphany January 2021

Welcome

Epiphany means revealing, showing or appearing.

The revealing of Jesus Christ as God in human form is perhaps the most profound revelation in all of scripture. It is hard for us to imagine just how incredible it must have been for the disciples and other followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry to realise that here, right in their midst, was the Lord and God of all eternity, the one who created heaven and earth, who holds all things in His hands.

Epiphany reminds us of the Magi undertaking a long and dangerous journey because of the significance what had been revealed to them. Their faith and perseverance was rewarded with an encounter which had a great impact on them, and on Mary and Joseph, and indeed which has continued to speak powerfully to Christians in the centuries since.

This Epiphany is, of course, very different to others because of the circumstances in which we celebrate it. But despite

this, our need to realise that Jesus is God made flesh, that He is the God who knows what it is to suffer, the God who brings hope where none seems possible, is greater than ever. May we all today have our eyes opened again to the wonder of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, we come before you today
With thanks and with praise for the moment of Epiphany.
You know the troubles of the whole world at this time
The worries and fears that affect so many
And the impact of this pandemic on our churches and ministries.
May this time be a moment when the realisation of who You are,
Of Your amazing love and Your ability to break through all barriers
Fill us with hope
And a renewed determination to serve You and love You
And shine Your light and blessing in our homes and communities.
In the name of Jesus we pray
Amen.

Bible Reading – Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

The Magi Visit the Messiah
After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea,
during the time of King Herod,
Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 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.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed,
and all Jerusalem with him.

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.

“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied,
“for this is what the prophet has written:
‘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.’”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly
and found out from them the exact time the star had
appeared.

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.”

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.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

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.

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

Hymn – Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning

St Martin's Singers

Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;
star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

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.

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?
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.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;
star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Meditation

Well, we made it at last.

After all the setbacks,
all the frustration,
we finally found the one we were looking for —
our journey over,
the quest completed.

And I can't tell you how relieved we were.

You see, we'd begun to fear we'd be too late,
the time for celebration long since past
by the time we eventually arrived. .

It was that business in Jerusalem which caused the delay,
all the waiting,

while Herod and his entourage rummaged around
trying to discover what we were on about.

They were unsettled for some reason,
taken aback, it seemed, by the news we brought,
apparently unaware a king had been born among them.
A rival claimant, they must have thought,
and who could tell what trouble that might stir up? ,

Anyway, they pointed us in the right direction if nothing else,
but we'd wasted time there we could ill-afford,
and although the star reappeared to lead us again
we were almost falling over ourselves with haste

by the time we reached Bethlehem.

It was all quiet,

just as we feared -

no crowds,

no family bustling around offering their congratulations,

no throng of excited visitors,

just an ordinary house —

so ordinary we thought we'd gone to the wrong place.

But we went in anyway,

and the moment we saw the child, we knew he was the one

—

not just the King of the Jews,

but a prince among princes,

a ruler among rulers,

a King of kings!

We were late,

much later than intended,

the journey far more difficult than we ever expected,

but it was worth the effort,

worth struggling on,

for, like they say, 'Better late than never!'

Prayer

Gracious God,

such is your love for us that you go on calling,

however long it takes for us to respond,

and you go on leading

however tortuous our journey of faith may be.

We may put off a decision,

keep you at arm's length -
still you are there to guide,
striving to draw us to yourself.

We may encounter obstacles which impede our progress,
which cause us to take wrong directions,
which obscure the truth,
yet always you are there to set us back on the way.
Teach us that your love will never let us go,
and so help us to make our response
and bring our lives to you in joyful homage, knowing that you
will continue to lead us
until our journey's end;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Reflective Music – What Child is This?

St Martins Singers

William Chatterton Dix
(1837-1898) and others

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,
all tongues and peoples own him,
the King of kings salvation brings,
let every heart enthrone him:
Raise, raise your song on high
while Mary sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy, for Christ is born
the babe, the son of Mary.

Prayerful Reflection

(Based on our bible reading from Matthew 2:1-12)

What do you read for signs of god's presence?

does your interest go down as well as up?

can you spot a good investment?

have you outsourced your spirituality?

do you call in consultants to tell you where the christ might be found?

do you really want to know?

how far would you go to see god?

would you come down to the ground floor lobby?

as far as the tube station?

as far as Brighton?

would you stand all the way?

would you switch off your phone in the stable?

how much would you spend on presents?

would you give Christ a golden hello?

10% of pre-tax earnings?

a tip for the markets?

a few more stables and a derby winner?

would you buy shares in his suffering or sell him cheap when the market falls?

how far would you go to oppose god?

who would you kill? and how many?

is your intelligence good?
do you know which safe house the Christ-child is in?
do you ask how many others are in the building?
in whose game are you a pawn?

do you play for Herod or leave by another route?
do you expect a good return?

Diocesan Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we meet as members
of Mothers' Union in Manchester
may we know your presence and hear your word.
Teach us how best to serve you,
seeing not just the needs of this diocese
but those of the wider world.
Help us at all times to trust in you and seek to do your will.
Fill us with your spirit, encourage us, use us and bless us,
that we may have strength to follow your way.
We pray in sure hope and the assurance of your power.
Amen.

Blessing

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.
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you, this day and always.
Amen

Hymn – Oh Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

St Martin's Singers

John Samuel Bewley Monsell

(1811-1875)

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name!

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,
comfort thy sorrows, and answer thy prayerfulness,
guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine:
truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
these are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name!

Thank you for joining in with Thursday Prayers.

Reflections: Nick Fawcett, "No Ordinary Man"

Choral music: The Church of England St Martin in the Fields

Theme music: Canon Catherine Hilton

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Next Thursday Prayers will be on 11th February with a theme of 'Rebuilding hope and confidence'.