

Christ Church URC and The Bridgewater Drive Church (URC)

Service Sunday 02 January 2022 at 10am

Welcome to everyone, those in church and at home to our service this morning. May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a very Happy and Prosperous 2022.

Call to Worship: Isaiah Chapter 9 verse 6:

"A child is born to us!

A son is given to us!

And he will be our ruler.

He will be called "Wonderful Counsellor" "Mighty God" "Eternal Father"

"Prince of Peace"

Hymn: Rejoice & Sing 183

- 1) 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!
- 2) Cold on his cradle the dewdrops 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 thine aid,
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Prayer

Creator God, you love us despite our best endeavours to alienate you and we know that through your Son, Jesus Christ, you hear all our prayers. Forgive us, for we know that we are always failing you. You are beyond belief for you love us as a parent loves their children, not children that are perfect, but with all their faults and imperfections. You are our shepherd who seeks us out and shows us the way and who rejoices in one lost sheep who returns.

We give thanks for all the gifts that you have given to us, for without you we are nothing. We especially give thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross at Calvary, so that those who believe in him, will have their sins forgiven and have everlasting life.

Above all we remember and give thanks that we have been yours in the past, are yours now and will be yours forever.

And now we say together the prayer Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever

Amen

Today's readings are :

Isaiah Ch. 60vv1-6

St Matthew Ch. 2vv1-12

Hymn: Rejoice & Sing 188 –

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|---|---|
| 1) Born in the night, Mary's child, A long way from your home, Coming in need, Mary's child, Born in a borrowed room. | 2) Clear shing light, Mary's child, your face lights up our way, light of the world, Mary's child, Dawn on our darkest day. |
| 3) Truth of our life, Mary's child, You tell us god is good; Prove it is true, Mary's child, Go to your cross of wood. | 4) Hope of the world, Mary's child, you're coming soon to reign, King of the earth, Mary's child, Walk in our streets again. |

Talk

Epiphany – its relevance to us

In many churches the festival of Epiphany has been lost. Of course, the story of the wise men and what followed is still told, but no fuss is made on 6th. Of January -Epiphany, other than that is when we take down our Christmas decorations and even that is followed less and less.

In Spain, where my partner and I had a holiday home for many years the 6th. January is Three Kings Day and there are processions and gifts are given in many families on this day rather than Christmas Day. In Torre Del Mar, near to where our holiday home was the three kings rode in a pink Cadillac through the town – how 21st century!

In preparing this talk, I looked up the meaning of "Epiphany" in my trusted Chambers Dictionary and three definitions are shown:

- (a) A church festival celebrated in commemoration of the manifestation of Christ to the Wise Men of the East;
- (b) A sudden revelation of or insight into the nature, essence or meaning of something;

I have had a number of moments as suggested in the second definition, in particular sitting a physics exam and suddenly realizing what a particular question was all about after struggling for a whole school term to understand it!

However, it is the first definition that I want to consider. We could argue that the story of the wise men was moved to just after Jesus' birth to suit Matthew's narrative, because Herod's instruction was to kill all male

children under the age of two, and this would fit into the length of the Journey that these wise men would have undertaken to reach Jesus.

God warned both Joseph and the wise men of Herod's intention and the Holy Family fled to Egypt and stayed there until it was safe to return on Herod's death. The flight out of Egypt was entirely natural as often, throughout the troubled centuries before Jesus came, when some peril and some tyranny and some persecution made life intolerable for the Jews they fled to Egypt. The result was that every city in Egypt had its colony of Jews, indeed the colony in Alexandria was estimated at more than one million.

So far so good, but is it a one off? Certainly not! For example French Protestants called Huguenots fled to England to avoid persecution. What saddens me, is that given Jesus was an innocent child fleeing from the obsessions of a king who thought he was going to be deposed – he was after all appointed by the Romans and was not well liked by the people of Judea – if we travel forward 2021 years the situation is still the same. Jesus was a refugee like the people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to name but a few, who are fleeing from tyrannical regimes.

I once heard someone I knew vaguely, asking why the refugees were fleeing, surely it was better for them to remain in their own countries? There was someone who had a total lack of understanding about why the refugee crisis has arisen. Would we have told Jesus to go back to his own country and face certain death, because if we had, we would have killed Christianity before it even got started. Yet, that is what a lot of people seem to be asking governments to do - return then home, we don't want them here using our resources and taking our jobs. We seem to have failed these people totally. We are lucky and even the worst off are rich compared to most of these refugees who have nothing. I pray and hope that Jesus Christ will open our eyes and our hearts to follow the example he set for us. As he said those who help the needy are helping him and he showed us in the parable of the Good Samaritan who our neighbors are – those who are most in need, irrespective of nationality, race or religion or any other factor that distinguishes one person from another.

Prayers of Intercession – Thora Ker

Hymn: Rejoice & Sing 187

- 1) Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim,
gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
bring and adore him, the Lord is his name

- 2) 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 be for thee.

- 3) 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.

- 4) 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.

- 5) Worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim,
gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
bring and adore him, the Lord is his name.

Blessing

Go forth in the knowledge that your God is always with you to light up the darkest path, that your Saviour, Jesus Christ, walks beside you and that God's Holy Spirit will sustain and strengthen you with its power, its grace and its love.

The Lord bless you and keep you,

the lord make his face to shine upon you

And be gracious unto you:

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,

And give you peace.

Amen

