

The Camel-Allen Churches

Worship at home



Sunday 3 January 2021 ~ Epiphany

Opening Acclamation

The Lord be with you.

God in Christ has revealed his glory.

Come, let us worship.

From the rising of the sun to its setting

The Lord's name is to be praised.

Give him praise, you servants of the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord!

Hymn: (*we say or sing*)

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

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth thou would 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.

We make our confession and receive God's forgiveness...

Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

**Father,
we have sinned against heaven and against you.
We are not worthy to be called your children.**

**We turn to you again.
Have mercy on us,
bring us back to yourself
as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen**

I believe that God forgives and sets us free.

**We believe that God forgives and sets us free;
and we commit ourselves
to follow where Christ calls
and to love one another.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his service
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Iona Gloria

O God, you summon the day to dawn,
you teach the morning to waken the earth.
Great is your name; great is your love.
Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

For you the valleys shall sing for joy,
the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Great is your name; great is your love.
Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

For you the monarchs of the earth shall bow,
the poor and persecuted shall shout for joy
Great is your name; great is your love.
Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

Your love and mercy shall last forever,
fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise
Great is your name; great is your love.
Gloria, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.



The Collect for Epiphany

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 for ever. Amen

Readings

Isaiah 60.1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² 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.

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.



Ephesians 3.1-12

¹ This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Hymn

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped,
To that lowly manger-bed
There to bend the knee before
him whom heav'n and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek thy mercy seat.

As their precious gifts they laid,
at thy manger roughly made
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heav'nly king.

Holy Jesus, ev'ry day
keep us in the narrow way,
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heav'nly country bright
need they no created light,
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our King.

Matthew 2.1-12 The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, '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.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "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." '

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.' ⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



Reflection

I wonder what we would have said if they had arrived here, here in the middle of our nice, neat Sunday morning routine, these travellers asking their disturbing questions? We call them wise men, kings even and these respectable titles rather mask the fact that, quite frankly, they were a bit weird: they ate the wrong food, wore strange clothes, spoke a strange language. They followed the wrong traditions: were they Astronomers, Astrologers or Magicians even? They were quite outside God's chosen people. Aliens, foreigners, strangers, Gentiles! Sinners! Would we have given them the time of day? Would we have realised they were genuinely searching for the truth, for God's revelation? Would we have recognised that God might have spoken to them through their strange beliefs? Sadly, we often want to restrict God's influence to our own kind, those who share our understanding and our ways, but that is to attempt to limit the great God of all the earth – always a foolish thing to try!

And so they came, these strange visitors, three or was it two or six – or twelve as the eastern church celebrates? We don't actually know how many there were, except that the plural 'Magi' is used, so there must have been more than one. The three is just presumed from the number of gifts and so it might have been three but not necessarily so. They came searching for the child born king of the Jews. Which seems a strange thing for them to do. Why go to so much trouble and effort to pay homage to the infant King of an insignificant and occupied country, unless they somehow knew he was something more? Have they heard and pieced together the ancient prophecies that the Jews themselves were blind to?

"We three kings of Orient are" we sing, but Matthew doesn't say they were kings. The tradition seems to arise from their wealth – that they can afford such costly gifts as Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh and

afford the time and expense of this long journey. Added to this are a number of OT prophecies such as that in Psalm 72 set for today, which speaks of kings bowing down before him and offering gifts.

So maybe three and maybe kings, or leaders of some sort, wise men, but certainly gentiles, travellers from far away, from the direction of the rising sun, whether priests of Persia, Zoroastrians who were known as Magi or Babylonian scholars, who were known to study the stars, or from the far east, the Orient of our hymn, or, as in later tradition, representing different continents, they came seeking the truth about this birth, this king whose arrival they had foreseen in the stars.

In popular tradition we have conflated all the Christmas accounts and and centred them all on the stable (though it is a manger that is mentioned in Scripture not a stable at all!) and so we imagine the wise men arriving on their camels on the night of Christ's birth, just after the Shepherds have rushed in with their lambs. It makes a nice picture; it is familiar, iconic, and sanitised. We can act it out with our children and say 'Ahh!' But the danger is, that that is *all* we do.

But when at last the Magi come to the end of their journey: to the unexpected stable – or were the new family in a house now as Matthew states, 'on entering the house, they saw the child' maybe not a babe in arms any longer, but a toddler. They pay him homage and present their precious gifts. It seems, weird as they are, outsiders as they are, God has indeed been speaking to them, guiding them, drawing them to this Epiphany- this unveiling. And, this little child, this manifestation of God made flesh, come to dwell among us, did not disappoint, but rather overwhelmed them with joy!

We should not be too smug about these weird strangers for it is we who these outsiders represent. We too were once 'aliens and

strangers' as it says in the Ephesians passage we read earlier, it is we Gentiles and foreigners who have now amazingly 'become fellow-heirs, members of the same body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. We who now have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him'. This King who welcomed strangers to worship at his birth, welcomes us too, with open arms.

Have we become too comfortable with this uncomfortable stable? The stable is not after all the end of the journey, but the beginning. The Magi could not stay there where they found the Christchild, they had to move on, to return to their own country by another route, not the way they had planned, but changed now by the angels' message and by all that had been revealed in that moment of Epiphany.

Encountering the Christ-child puts us on another road too. We can't stay in the safety of the Christmas-card stable we've constructed. Meeting Jesus, Emmanuel, changes everything. We need to let *his* way change the way we live our lives, so that we can reflect the wonder of this 'God with us' to others, and pass the blessing on.

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 purpose in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Affirmation of faith

Though he was divine,
he did not cling to equality with God,
but made himself nothing.
Taking the form of a slave,
he was born in human likeness.
He humbled himself
and was obedient to death,
even the death of the cross.
Therefore, God has raised him on high,
and given him the name above every name:
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow,
and every voice proclaim
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Hymn

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 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.

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.

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray for those who may be born today
and bless them in Jesus' name:

**The joy of God shine from your face
and joy to all who see you;
the shield of God surround your head
and angels ever guard you.**

May every season be good for you
and the Prince of Peace give peace to you.

Let us pray for those who must work today
and bless them in Jesus' name:

**God bless you today,
the earth beneath your feet,
the path on which you tread,
the work of hand and mind,
the things which you desire.**

And when the day is over,
God bless you to your rest.

Let us pray for those who are sick in body mind or spirit today
and bless them in Jesus' name: especially...

**May the keeping of Christ be round you,
may the guarding of God be with you,
to possess you, to protect you
from danger and from loss.**

May the gospel of the God of grace
bless you from head to sole.

Let us pray for those who may face death today
and bless them in Jesus' name:

**May God provide for you
all that is needed
for body, mind and soul
as you face the final journey**

May Christ take your soul in his arms
and bring you through the balancing time
to the dwelling place of peace
and make it your home forever.

And let us pray for ourselves and one another:

**In the isolation or the busyness of this day
grant me a stillness of seeing, O God.**

**In the conflicting voices of my heart
grant me a calmness of hearing.
Let our seeing and hearing
our words and our actions
be rooted in a silent certainty of your presence.**

**Let our passions for life
and the longings for justice that stir within us
be grounded in the experience of your stillness.
Let my life be rooted in the ground of your peace, O God,
let me be rooted in the depths of your peace. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...



Hymn

1 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.

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

3 Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, gladly raising,
worship him, God most high.

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

5 Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
earth to heav'n replies.



Thanksgiving

For all that God can do within us,
for all that God can do beyond us,
Thanks be to God.

For all in whom Christ lived before us,
for all in whom Christ lives beside us,
Thanks be to God.

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
for where the Spirit wants to send us,
Thanks be to God. Amen

Benediction

Lord God,
the bright splendour whom the nations seek:
may we who with the wise men have been drawn by your light
discern the glory of your presence in your Son,
the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**And may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be among us and remain with us always. Amen**

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