



The United Reformed Church in Lion Walk
Christ Church United Reformed Church
The United Reformed Church at Chappel

Sunday 3rd January 2021

Call to Worship: Around the world people gather to break bread and pour wine.
 We gather with them in heart and mind.
 Around the world the broken body is made whole.
 As part of that body we join in its unity.
 Around the world the Banquet of God is prepared for the table.
 We, who share in the banquet, come eagerly to be fed.
 Let us worship together, let us share God's bounty.

Meditation

At the dawn of a new year,
we come to welcome hope for a new world.

Let the darkness lift,
to welcome a dawn of plenty,
with enough for everyone
and people ready to share.

Let the day begin,
with new energy for the struggle
to protect our children
and to care for the vulnerable.

Let the light shine,
to open a path to safety
for all who are seeking home
and longing for life.

Let the sun rise
on new talks and new resolve
to end the conflict and the terror
and to find solutions that will last.

At the dawn of a new year
we come to declare our hope
and to welcome a new world.

May we hold lovingly in our thoughts
those who suffer from sickness, pain, cruelty, and injustice,
and work every day towards the alleviation of their suffering.

May we recognize our solidarity
with the stranger, outcast, downtrodden, abused, and deprived,
that no human being be treated as "other,"
that our common humanity weaves us together
as one worldwide family

May we pursue the Biblical prophet's vision of peace,
that we might live harmoniously with each other
and side by side,
respecting differences,
cherishing diversity,
with no one exploiting the weak,
each living without fear of the other,
each revering Divinity in every human soul.

May we struggle against institutional injustice,
seek freedom for all from oppression and contempt,
act with purity of heart and mind,
despising none, defrauding none, hating none,
cherishing all, honouring every child of God,
every creature of the earth.

May we and all peoples know peace in this New Year,
And may we nurture kindness and love everywhere.

The Lord's Prayer:

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Reading: **Matthew 2:1-12**

Hymn 184

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,
Saviour, to thy lowly bed,
there to bend the knee before
thee whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek thy mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
at thy cradle rude and bare;
so may we with holy joy,
pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.

Holy Jesus, every 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 heavenly 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.

Reading: **Matthew 2:13-15**

Reflection

The foreign strangers that King Herod encountered were not kings, they were Magi, most likely Persian or Babylonian experts in the occult, which in Matthew's time would have been understood as astrologers and interpreters of dreams. This would not have been seen as odd in the ancient world.

The star which these men follow becomes a bridge between Gentile world and the Jewish world. Two different worlds sharing the same goal: hope for the future. Matthew reminds us that even from Jesus' birth, we see the walls between races and cultures breaking down. The Gentile magi are seen to have the ability to be obedient to God by literally and figuratively following the light - while King Herod, the chief priests, and scribes serve as foils to show the unbelief of some of the people to whom Jesus was sent.

Matthew consistently relates everything back to Jesus' future story.. The worst sin in Matthew's Gospel is the hypocrisy of the Judaeen leadership, which King Herod portrays well in his sneaky and murderous intentions when engaging with the trusting Magi. It also foreshadows what will happen later to Jesus because the past in Matthew always points to Jesus and Jesus' future. This interpretation is appropriate both to Matthew's era and the community to which he writes. There are two claims to kingship: the one in this world, which Herod is keen to retain, and the divine kingship which Jesus represents. The wonder which the Magi see and interpret translates into faithful action as they seek to pay homage to Jesus, while Herod scrambles in fear and plots murder.

If the Magi were from the East - meaning the Babylonian empire in this context, consider what a long journey they would have had to make. It echoes Abraham's obedience to God in traveling from Ur, in modern-day southern Iraq, all the way to Egypt and back to Hebron in the Promised Land of Israel. What would compel not just one person but three to follow a sign in the sky on such a dangerous journey so far from home?

We have been living through a global pandemic for almost an entire year. Our journey has been long and we do not know when the end will be in sight. The ambiguous loss creates discomfort. We are tired of wandering through the wilderness, all the anchors which used to hold us in place uprooted, setting us adrift. Adapting daily to new information and ways of doing things is tiring. Personal losses, whether through death, a job loss, or other changes, deplete our emotional reserves. Many wonder why God would allow this to happen, and some have lost their faith in God. This is where our story and that of the three Magi converge. We are not lost. We are travelling toward something greater than ourselves and Emmanuel - God with us - is as close as our breath. As Christians in this broken, hurting world, we can act now to reach out to our neighbours and offer hospitality of the heart. We have what the Magi and Matthew's community had: hope for a better future in Christ.

Like them, we follow the star that brings us to Jesus, and, in knowing Jesus, we change course, going home another way. Life will never be the same as it was before the pandemic. There is a quote often attributed to Carl Jung that was actually written by Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch Renaissance humanist and theologian: Bidden or unbidden, God is present. The Magi did not know God in the way that the Judaeen people did. Yet God's sign compelled them to become part of God's hopeful story. Christian hope has been defined as living "with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world". God is doing a new thing even now, and we are all invited to be part of the unfolding hope. And so at this time we ask ourselves: are we ready - and willing - to follow the star? Perhaps to a strange unfamiliar world a long way from our comfort zone - but where God is present, bidden or unbidden, and where the light of Christ leads us on.

Communion:

Among friends, gathered round a table, Jesus took bread, and, having blessed it, he broke the bread and gave it to his disciples saying, 'This is my body which is given for you.' In the same way he took wine, and, having given thanks for it, he poured it out and gave the cup to his disciples saying, 'This cup is the new relationship with God, sealed with my blood. Take this and share it. I shall drink wine with you next in the coming kingdom of God.'

So now, following Jesus example, we take this bread and this cup; the ordinary things of the world through which God will bless us.

Loving God, we give thanks for your love revealed to us in Jesus, and we thank you that through him, through his life and example, his death and resurrection, we can live in the faith that your kingdom will come, and that in life, in death and beyond death you are with us.

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now, as we do now what you did in an upstairs room, breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and this cup, that they be spiritual food and drink for us, renewing, sustaining and making us whole, and that we may be your body on earth, loving and caring in the world. Amen.

The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said: This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is the communion of the blood of Christ.

Prayer:

Loving God, as we have received these gifts of bread and wine,
you have fed us with the spiritual food of the body and blood
of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thank you for assuring us of your goodness and love,
and that we are members of his body.

**Renew us by your Holy Spirit,
unite us in the body of your Son,
and bring us with all your people
into the joy of your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Hymn 603

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that Word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the Word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt you,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without you:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us -
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Benediction:

God, bless each of us as we travel on. In our times of need may we find a table spread in the wilderness and companions on the road. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each of us, and with all those we love, today and for ever more. Amen