

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit

Sunday Worship Sheet – Sunday 9th January 2022 – Epiphany Sunday

Our worship for this week was written by Howard Jackson,
a Local Preacher and Member at St. John's Bangor.

Opening Prayers: The story is out! Jesus Christ, the light of the world, has been born to dispel the darkness that covers its people. God's glory appears in human form. Life on earth will never be the same again. Father God, the star that led the magi to the stable announced to the world that its Saviour was born. Today we live in a world that is still covered by darkness, still needing to make that journey to the stable door. May our lives reflect your light day by day as we seek to serve wherever you have placed us, so that we might be the means through which others can encounter Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn 1: 173 Into the darkness of this world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXKOxub5obc>

Prayer of adoration: Arise, shine, for the light of the world has come. Darkness covers the earth and its people but the radiance of God's light burns away its shadows, illuminates the smallest corner and heralds the start of a new day. Hearts need no longer fear; souls can be set free; one shall follow another, nation follow nation, and kings and princes bow down in awe before the one who comes to reign. Arise, shine, for the light of the world has come. Hallelujah!

Prayer of confession: We stand at your feet, Lord God, creation facing its creator, hearts laid bare by your light, humbly asking for mercy.

We come as a people in need of assurance and forgiveness. We come as a people in need of healing and wholeness. We come dependent upon your grace.

Draw close to us. Enfold us in your arms. Fill us with your Spirit; that we might reflect your light in this dark world, speak your word with boldness and draw others to your feet. Amen.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Coming of Light

I saw a dim light, a narrow gate, a stone-strewn path,

A steep slope stretching before me

In the fading twilight of a winter's day.

Inquisitive to know, my steps gained the gate

And urged me through towards the faint light

Of a rising star that lures me ever on,

Lighting my life.

Hymn 2: 225 Bethlehem of noblest cities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdmEK9KrZEE>

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection: Before Christmas, I watched a Sky at Night program dedicated to the development of telescopes and their scientific use. Maybe you have seen the picture taken from the Hubble spacecraft of the most distant galaxies that featured in the programme – hundreds of galaxies in a single picture. Each galaxy is formed by

hundreds of billions of stars, every one like the sun. Even the Hubble telescope cannot show such stars individually. But it does show light which has been on its way towards us for over ten billion years. It is a sobering thought that Hubble's telescope is the only one in existence capable of revealing distant galaxies in this kind of detail. This really underlines the limitations of earth-based telescopes, no matter how powerful. The Earth's atmosphere mars their view even on a mountain-top. The unaided eye has an even more limited view. Which brings us to the Magi from Persia. Watching the sky, centuries before the first telescope, they saw the Messiah's star and followed it to Jerusalem. They were astrologers, star gazers, watching the movement of constellations and planets. What drew their attention to it? It must have appeared suddenly. Perhaps it moved slowly across the star background so that they saw it in a different position in the constellations each night. It could have been approaching the Earth and getting progressively brighter. It was in view long enough for them to travel the several hundred miles to Jerusalem. It is most likely to have been either a comet, or an extremely bright supernova (exploding giant star). Whatever it was, the Magi recognised its uniqueness and therefore its significance as a sign from God.

So they went to Jerusalem, evidently expecting that a new king would be found in a royal palace. Not only were they disappointed to find no baby there, but their story also alarmed the king and his court. Herod had suddenly realised that things were getting out of his control. But he was wise enough to wonder if perhaps there was a prophecy about where the Messiah would be born. His religious experts had the answer from the prophet Micah, quoting verses 2 and 4, in Bethlehem. Herod was so desperate to dispose of his rival that he worked out a cunning plan, using the Magi, to achieve his ends. God had other ideas and made sure the Magi avoided Jerusalem on their return to Persia.

All the way to Bethlehem from Jerusalem, the star was visibly moving south in front of the Magi. A comet can become visible during the day when it gets to its closest approach to the sun. The star travelled in front of them until they reached the house where Joseph, Mary and Jesus were staying. There it was as they approached the house, just above the place itself. Journey's end!

Epiphany means "revealing". In the Church calendar, this Sunday is the first of the Epiphany season. Over the next six Sundays we will celebrate Jesus being revealed to other people in other places at other times in other ways. It is very significant that the very first revealing of the baby Messiah to the world is not to Jews, but to Gentiles. Matthew records the event without comment, but the implication is quite clear that Jesus is God's gift to the whole world. The real significance of this we only understand in retrospect. God's Covenant with Abraham was coming to an end. The days of the old order of temple worship, sacrifice and the Law of Moses were numbered. Jesus the Messiah had been born, bring God's kingdom on Earth with him. For everyone!

The star-gazers in Persia had no need of telescopes. What appeared in the sky was readily detectable by the naked eye for those who were alert and on the look-

out. The challenge to us is to look out for and recognise signs from God which are significant to us. It may not be a bright new star. Very likely it will be much more subtle. An idea that won't go away? A deep conversation with a friend? Or perhaps a chance meeting in a car park with an old acquaintance? Even a vivid dream. The challenge is to recognise the sign as the start of a new journey with Jesus bringing a life-changing experience.

Pause for thought.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Thank you, God, for your transforming love in the miracle of creation: The skipping calf and the cedar tree, the pulse of new life in the frozen ground waiting beneath the rhythms of wind and weather.

Thank you, God, for your transforming love in the miracle of Jesus: He came humbly to the draughts and dusty rafters of obscurity, in the corner of a stable, shrinking his radiance to the size of a candle, to light up our faces and lives with wonder.

Thank you, God, for your transforming love in the miracle of the Spirit: The baptism that changes lives and destinies through the whisper of grace descending.

Thank you, God, for your transforming love. Amen.

Prayers for others: We pray for the worldwide church: for the poor, the hungry, those caught up in conflict; for the powerless, persecuted, exploited or oppressed; for ... Come, Holy Spirit, come to your people; comfort us, encourage us: fire us with your love.

We pray for the church in this society: for the unity that witnesses to the love of Christ; for a deeper concern to meet the needs of refugees and communities whose harvests have failed; for ... Come, Holy Spirit, come to your people; comfort us, encourage us: fire us with your love.

We pray for the world: for the leaders of nations to realise that peace-making and cooperation are more fruitful than confrontation and conflict; for a united effort to eradicate poverty, malnutrition and disease across the world; for ... Come, Holy Spirit, come to your people; comfort us, encourage us: fire us with your love.

We pray for ourselves: that we may remain faithful to our baptismal promises; that we may hold fast to your promises to us; help us to produce good fruit that contributes to the common good; especially those in need in our own community; for ... Come, Holy Spirit, come to your people; comfort us, encourage us: fire us with your love. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Hymn 3: 170 Darkness like a shroud covers the Earth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHG3YS0NGJc>

Blessing: Christ our Lord, to whom kings bowed down in worship and offered gifts, reveal to you his glory and pour upon you the riches of his grace; so that you enjoy his presence in your life every moment of every day of your life.

Long ago, wise men came seeking Jesus; wise people seek him still!

Hymn 173

- 1 Into the darkness of this world,
into the shadows of the night ;
into this loveless place you came,
lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
and made these hearts your home.
Into the darkness once again —
O come, Lord Jesus, come.
*Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls :
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*
- 2 Into the longing of our souls,
into these heavy hearts of stone,
shine on us now your piercing light,
order our lives and souls aright,
by grace and love unknown,
until in you our hearts unite —
O come, Lord Jesus, come.
*Come with your love
to make us whole,
come with your light to lead us on,
driving the darkness far from our souls :
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*
- 3 O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
hope of the ages, God with us,
visit again this broken place,
till all the earth declares your praise
and your great mercies own.
Now let your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.
*Come in your glory,
take your place,
Jesus, the Name above all names,
we long to see you face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.*

Maggi Dawn (b. 1959)

Hymn 225

- 1 Bethlehem, of noblest cities
none can once with thee compare ;
thou alone the Lord from heaven
didst for us incarnate bear.
- 2 Fairer than the sun at morning
was the star that told his birth,
to the world its God announcing,
seen in fleshly form on earth.
- 3 Eastern sages at his cradle
make oblations rich and rare ;
see them give, in deep devotion,
gold and frankincense and myrrh.

- 4 Sacred gifts of mystic meaning :
incense doth their God disclose,
gold the King of kings proclaimeth,
myrrh his sepulchre foreshows.
- 5 Holy Jesus, in thy brightness
to the Gentile world displayed,
with the Father and the Spirit
endless praise to thee be paid.

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348–c. 413)

translated by Edward Caswall (1814–1878)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 225 .

Hymn 170

- 1 Darkness like a shroud covers the earth.
Evil like a cloud covers the people.
But the Lord will rise upon you
and his glory will appear on you,
nations will come to your light.
*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you !
Arise, shine, your light has come,
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*
- 2 Children of the light, be clean and pure.
Rise, you sleepers, Christ will shine on you.
Take the Spirit's flashing two-edged sword
and with faith declare God's mighty word ;
stand up and in his strength be strong.
- 3 Here among us now, Christ the Light
kindles brighter flames in our trembling
hearts.
Living Word, our lamp, come guide our feet
as we walk as one in light and peace
till justice and truth shine like the sun.
- 4 Like a city bright so let us blaze ;
lights in every street turning night to day.
And the darkness shall not overcome
till the fullness of Christ's kingdom comes,
dawning to God's eternal day.
*Arise, shine, your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has risen on you !
Arise, shine, your light has come,
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world,
Jesus the Light of the world has come.*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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