

## Worship - Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021

### Epiphany with Holy Communion

Opening music: As with gladness, men of old

Good morning everyone, and welcome to today's worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. We are so glad you have chosen to join us today as we worship the Lord together and have fellowship! We hope anyone who has not worshiped with us before will feel at home with us.

*Pause*

Loving God, who breaks through the darkness of doubt and despair, be with us this day as we hear of the visit of the Wise Ones, who risked everything to follow a Star. Let us open our hearts and be willing to risk receiving the gift of gracious Love that you have to offer us in the form of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

### Call to worship

Arise, shine, for your light has come.

The glory of the Lord has risen upon you!

**The glory of God shines in the darkness.**

Lift up your eyes and look around.

Follow the star, wherever it leads!

**Take the journey that leads to the child.**

Let your hearts rejoice.

Be overwhelmed with joy!

**We worship the Christ child,  
the hope of the world.**

## **Carol: Hark the Herald Angels Sing**

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the new born King,  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!”  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with th’ angelic host proclaim,  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the new born King!”  
Christ, by highest heaven adored;  
Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of a virgin’s womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail th’ incarnate Deity,  
pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the new born King!”

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that man no more may die,  
born to raise the sons of earth,  
born to give us second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the new born King!”

## **Prayers of Approach and confession**

The magi followed a star on a long and arduous journey to the place where Jesus lay, while shepherds were back in their fields, the town's many visitors were gone and life was almost back to normal, but for the presence of the long-hoped-for Messiah— a precious child ignored by most who passed by within Bethlehem's narrow streets.

- For all who have journeyed and found their Saviour, we give you thanks, and pray that those who have silently passed by might one day return and find the one who has waited patiently for them.
- Your light reveals to us the beauty of this world, for we see it through your eyes and the purpose for which it was created. Your light reveals to us the darkness in this world, for we see things as they are and how your children, once lost, might be set free. Your light reveals to us the wonder of your grace, for we see within your Son the hope of salvation and, through him, new life.
- When your light shines on those in need through hunger, injustice, oppression or fear, and we stay silent, wash our

hands and carry on, forgive us. You came to earth for such as these, fed the hungry, healed the sick, conquered fear, spoke out, turned over tables, challenged the way things were, and then passed the torch into the hands of your disciples.

Grant us the courage, compassion and faith to shine your light into unfamiliar and less comfortable places. *Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch*

**So come to us, come to us, God in Community, Holy in One,  
even as we pray together, saying,**

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

**Readings: read by Steve & Elizabeth English**  
**Isaiah 60: 1 - 6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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.

## **Matthew 2: 1 – 12**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, "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." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>'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.'" <sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then 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.”

<sup>9</sup>When 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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On 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. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Hymn:** The First Noel

The first Noel the angel did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds  
In fields as they lay;  
In fields where they  
lay keeping their sheep  
on a cold winter's night  
That was so deep.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

They looked up and saw a star  
Shining in the East beyond them far;  
And to the earth it gave great light,  
And so it continued both day and night.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

And by the light of that same star  
Three wise Men came from country far,  
To seek for a king was their intent,  
And to follow the star  
wherever it went.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

This star drew nigh to the northwest  
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest;  
And there it did both stop and stay  
right over the place where Jesus lay.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

Then entered in those Wise Men three  
Full reverently upon the knee;  
And offered there in His presence  
Their gold, and myrrh and frankincense.

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
Born is the King of Israel.*

Arranged and produced by Dan Doty (2020)

Prayer:

As we pause together this morning to consider the light of  
your Word shining for each of us to see our way in the world,  
may we hear what it is you have to say to each one of us,  
loving God, from the scriptures we are privileged to hear and  
read. Amen

## Reflection:

Over the last few days every website, magazine, and newspaper has been selling January 1st-dated potential with headlines like "New Year, New You" or "Ten Ways to Lose Weight/Get Rich/Find Love/Be the Best Person Ever in 2021." And, hey, if that kind of inspiration works for you, go you. May 2021 be your best year ever.

What can I say, that will be inspiring or encouraging as we begin a new year, which follows the most harsh & difficult one we have just stumbled through? There is a chink of light now for our world in the admirable & amazing work medical researchers have achieved in formulating & producing vaccinations – possibly the very best aspect of a tragic situation.

New Year's resolutions have never been a motivation for me. I've made resolutions in the past but, truth be told, I've never really felt all that interested to keep them. I used to think that was a character flaw. Now I think that maybe resolutions tied to the date of January 1st just aren't right for me because the best things in my life have come to me gradually. I didn't become a Christian by "making a decision for Christ." I became one because church has always been part of my life & when I think about it, I was drawn by the story of Christ and I decided it was for me to actively seek and follow him. I can't tell you the date that happened, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't January 1st. It wasn't any one day and I continue to follow a winding road with a number of diversions on the way.



The thing about God's grace, and the changes that it causes us to make, is that it rarely comes on our own schedules or the way we had mapped things out. It even less rarely comes on a date that has rather arbitrarily, at this place and this time in the whole of history, come to be the start of a new year. If something big happens in life, it will come because of God's grace, and it will likely come at an unexpected time, maybe all at once, or maybe little by little. Life and the year ahead is unmapped – like a road before us we will need to travel, whatever lies before us.

We've been together on one such road this Advent and Christmas as we followed the road to Bethlehem in our candle lighting liturgy. We've celebrated the birth of Jesus after journeying with Mary & Joseph on that road. Shepherds travelled to find them too. And now we have heard the story of the Wise Men who were on the road while all that was happening and they took a pretty winding route via Jerusalem, carrying valuable gifts. The Wise Men set out on a journey, following a sign, on a road that was unknown and unmapped but they knew they had to seek the new king.

In this week of Epiphany, I believe we celebrate the central truth of Christmas - that truth to which their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh constantly bear witness: the truth that Jesus is God come to earth to live and die as one of us.

*Gold - it was and still is the gift of kings. And when the Wise Men held out their gift of gold to the baby Jesus, they were saying something important: "However tiny you are, and however wrong a place this is for you to be, you are a true king, and you are worthy to receive this gift of kings."*

*Myrrh - an aromatic potion that was used to prevent the spread of infection and mask the smell of death and decay. And by presenting Jesus with myrrh they were symbolically anointing him for death and burial.*

*Frankincense - for thousands of years and in many different cultures across the globe, incense has been the traditional offering to a deity. And in presenting the infant with such a gift, the Wise Men were saying, "You are God himself come to earth in human form."*

In those gifts we see so much & being reminded of their significance can bring us some comfort and confidence as we step on to the uncharted road that is 2021. God is with us.

If I were to resolve to do anything today, I suppose it would be to take time in the Season of Epiphany to explore and celebrate the presence of God within my own life & look afresh at the path He calls me to follow. Because, everyone, it's time to take down the decorations, vacuum up the pine needles, consign the turkey leftovers to the freezer or better still the dustbin, and let the Baby Jesus grow up into a man.

In this New Year we can look back fondly at the Christmas story as the Wise men arrive & depart, but we can also look deeper and remember they represent another important truth: that the road carries on. As Christmas makes way for Epiphany, this is the point where we have to leave our mental pictures of the baby Jesus behind and focus afresh on the grown-up Jesus who died to bring us new life. Let's remember that the Christmas story leads us on to Easter. Yes, it's been good to travel the road to Bethlehem ...but now

it's time to travel a different road with Jesus, from birth to baptism to cross.

Lord  
of the manger and stranger,  
of the wintry scene and the stark Cross,  
of the orphan and sick,  
of light and love,  
Hear us as we pray.  
Grant us Your grace,  
that we may offer our hearts and lives to You,  
as we seek to proclaim Your Son through our words and  
deeds.  
Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

God who journeys with us  
we pray today for all those who have concerns:  
we pray for refugees and displaced people,  
for the homeless and those who ask  
“when shall I have a home”?

We pray for those worried about loss of work,  
shortage of money, collapse of plans, who ask  
“what happens now”?

We pray for all medical staff and hospital workers, who go to  
work knowing the risks they face; for medical researchers,  
continuing to refine the vaccines that bring us hope for the  
future; for social workers, protecting the vulnerable; for care  
workers, providing contact and support to those who have no

other help; for teachers, worrying about their charges who ask “how do we get through this day?”

We pray for those afflicted with coronavirus; for those with other illnesses and conditions which leave them vulnerable; for those with poor mental health; for all who suffer who ask “who can help me”?

We pray for those on our own hearts at this time..... *Silence*

**God who journeys with us, bring your love to these your people in need and help them to see you in their life.**

**AMEN**

## **Communion**

### **Invitation to Communion** (based on Matthew 2)

By the light of the star,  
God led travellers to the Christ child.  
When they saw the child  
they were overwhelmed with joy.  
By the light of divine love,  
God leads us to this holy meal.  
Gathered together,  
we encounter the living Christ  
and taste the deepest joy.

We give thanks because Jesus showed us the way,  
we give thanks because Jesus is the Way.  
Jesus was a gift from God for the world.  
He was called Immanuel, “God with us”.  
He came to save us from our sins.  
Jesus lived a life of thankfulness

and gave his life as a sacrifice for many.

We give thanks that he is our Saviour, Christ the Lord.

Let us celebrate this joyful feast. People will come from east and west and north and south and sit at table in the kingdom of God. Luke 13: 29

## **The Story**

We eat because on the night before Jesus died, he ate with his friends. The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: 'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this is remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We remember Jesus' birth and his presence as God with us.

We remember Jesus' life and his love.

We remember Jesus' suffering and death on the cross.

We remember the resurrection and the promise of life.

## **Let us pray:**

God of grace, thank you for this bread and wine,  
and for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ.

God of hope, fill us with your Spirit today.

Through this meal, strengthen us to be followers of Jesus,  
a community of peace in a broken world.

## **The Sharing of the Bread and Wine**

Take, eat; this is the body of Christ, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of him.

**Closing prayer:**

Jesus, you truly are Immanuel “God with us”.

In this season of hope, may the meal we`ve shared together nourish us to be your body in the world,  
your kingdom come,  
your will done on earth as it is in heaven.

**With the angels in heaven we join in singing your praises,**

**Glory to God in the highest.**

Amen.

**Blessing**

The Light of the Star, the light of God’s love, shines before you as you leave this time of worship.

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,  
may God hold you in the palm of His hand. Amen

Closing music: What star is this (Puer Noblis)

Responses led by Jennifer Radford

Opening & closing music from

<https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/>

Hymns:

Hark the herald angels sing sung by Gloria & Dan Doty  
(2020) engageworship.com

The First Noel Arranged and produced by Dan Doty (2020)

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