

Service of Holy Communion_2nd Sunday after Christmas

A celebration of Epiphany

Worship Leader Revd. Peter Widdess

Personal preparation before the service begins.
Please take time to remember where you are, and why you are here.
Give thanks and become still in the presence of God

Music before the service

1. While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
all seated on the ground,
the angel of the Lord came down
and glory shone around.

2. "Fear not" said he, for mighty dread
had seized their troubled mind;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
to you and all mankind."

3. To you in David's town this day
is born of David's line
a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord,
and this shall be the sign:

4. The heavenly babe you there shall find
to human view displayed,
all meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
and in a manger laid."

CCLI Song # 3081901
George Frideric Handel | Nahum Tate
© Words and music: Public Domain
CCLI Licence No. 546960

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.

And also with you

We pray with words from Psalm 72

May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores

bring tribute to him.

**May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.**

May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.

**For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.**

He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.

**He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.**

Long may he live!

May gold from Sheba be given him.

**May people ever pray for him
and bless him all day long.**

Glory be to the father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

As it was and is, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Gloria

5. Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
appeared a shining throng
of angels, praising God, who thus
addressed their joyful song:

6. "All glory be to God on high
and to the earth be peace;
goodwill hence forth from heaven to men
begin and never cease."

CCLI Song # 3081901
George Frideric Handel | Nahum Tate
© Words and music: Public Domain
CCLI Licence No. 546960

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.

The reading is taken from Isaiah 60, 1-6
Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God
Our hearts and our minds are open

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
“Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.
Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.
Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Gradual hymn

1. O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

2. O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth;
for Christ is born of Mary; and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond’ring love.

CCLI Song # 2099056
Phillips Brooks | Ralph Vaughan Williams
© Words: Public Domain; Music: 1906 Oxford University Press
CCLI Licence No. 546960

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew **Glory to you, O Lord**

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

I want to tell you a story.

Arthur had a double first in Classics and Theology. The academic world was open to him.

He felt he had a calling.... to be a missionary in China. First he was to be ordained in Liverpool and be a curate in the industrial town of St. Helens in Lancashire.

The Rector of the parish said: You must visit Jack Henderson, the Church Warden.

Arthur went to Jack's house. Doris opened the front door. She was Jack's daughter. She had just finished training as a primary school teacher.

Arthur and Doris saw each other quite often in the following months and fell in love. When he proposed marriage to her, he told her that he had signed a contract with the Church Missionary Society to go to China as a missionary. Doris was delighted at the idea of... seeing the world, being with Arthur, being a missionary in China...?

When they informed the Missionary Society of their engagement, Arthur was told to read his contract, especially the clause which said no marriage in the first six years of service.

Finally it was agreed that both would go to China as missionaries, in two different parts of China. They could visit each other once a year for a week and after 6 years they may marry. They were due to sail to China on the same ship in two single cabins at the beginning of January 1948. Arthur and Doris spent their final Christmas for many years in England with their parents. On Christmas Eve both received telegrams from the Missionary Society: "civil war in China spreading rapidly, both will be stationed in Shanghai, special licence for immediate marriage obtained, double cabin on ship is booked."

Four days later, 28th December, Holy Innocents Day, they were married. 6th January they boarded the ship in Southampton for the six week journey to Shanghai.

They were met at the docks in Shanghai by John Perry, an American missionary. He told them: You are taking over from us. I have already sent my wife to Taiwan. The communists will be here soon, and then I leave as soon as I have settled you in our house.

So Arthur became Professor for Old Testament in St John's University and Doris taught the students English. They lived on the compound of the university together with the few remaining missionaries. A few months later Chou En Lai and his army captured the city after a bitter fight against the soldiers of Chan Kai Shek.

The missionaries were put under house arrest.

There was no longer any contact to Britain.

In the official list of Church of England clergy in 1950 Arthur is listed as "present whereabouts unknown, presumed dead".

The church in China had to make difficult decisions. What should be the right form of relationship between Christians and communists in China? Doris noted in her diary how this led to deep conflicts between the few missionaries left on the compound in Shanghai, theological conflicts, conflicts of personalities and politics.

Then she wrote summer 1950: I am pregnant.

This was a problem for the Communists. If Doris or the baby should die, it would be bad propaganda for the new government.

Doris wrote in her diary: Bishop Wong, a dear old gentleman, has been arrested and tortured. He has accused us of being spies of the imperialists. We are to be thrown out of China.

After a difficult train journey to the north of China in deep winter, they were put on a ship to Hong Kong, where in April 51 their daughter Mary was born.

The Missionary Society told Arthur to teach in Hong Kong until the end of the academic year, by which time Doris and Mary would be fit to travel home.

The ship called in at Mumbai on their way home. The rep of the Missionary Society came on board and told the young family. "You get off here; we need you for the next academic year in Bangalore United Theological College. You are still under contract to the Mission.

In the course of the year Doris became pregnant again: She said, "Arthur I want to give birth to this child in England."

Arthur took a job as Vice-Principal of St. John's College in Durham.

March 1953 he wrote in his diary: "Peter was born this morning, went to Evensong in the Cathedral in the afternoon."

I never did ask who was looking after my sister.

I tell this story today here as a parable.

The Kingdom of God is like a Missionary Society which puts the human need of its workers before vision or calling. This was not the case in the story of my parents. This parish employs a priest – I hope it is the case here. To find the right balance between vision and the human beings who must live the vision is very difficult.

Or

The kingdom of God is like the three magi, who knew what they were doing – No, they didn't – they went to the wrong King and that had dreadful consequences. It is important that we have Holy Innocents Day directly after Christmas. It is important to remember what human beings can do to each other. My parents didn't know what they were doing either on Holy Innocents. But they shared with the Wise men that important gift of any Christian community – flexibility and the readiness to learn in the situation they are in.

Or

The Kingdom of God is like the gifts of the Magi: Gold is love; my parents certainly knew love from God and for each other.

Frankincense is prayer, discernment and calling. Discipleship is not easy or straightforward as the many uncertainties in my mother's diary reveal. Myrrh is the price, the holy innocents, Bishop Wong and many others.

(We found my mother's diary after her death. Wondering what to do with it, I was eventually led to an Institute in Harvard University, the largest Institute for China studies in USA. Elisabeth Perry, the woman in charge of the Institute, on hearing the bare bones of my parents' story in a mail from me, asked whether my parents knew her parents who at this time had taught in Shanghai. I found the reference to John Perry meeting my parents from the ship in Shanghai. Elisabeth told me that she had been born in the house in Shanghai, was evacuated to Taiwan and then lived with her parents in Tokyo. The diary has now been deposited in Harvard University Library. Elisabeth published 2019 a book on the church universities in China.

Intercessions

Dear Lord,

You will deliver the needy that cry out.

Show us ways to end our exploiting way of life regarding so many aspects.

And: let us admit our own areas of poverty. I know that it can easily sound cynical to say that in one of the richest countries there are. But looking at the people around me and the person in the mirror I see how often our days seem to be identical, we robot through our lives, our joys feel hollow.

Lead us – all of us – into the life in abundance you created us for. Don't let us dull our hunger for "more than that". Let us journey boldly, leave the familiar lands behind and follow your star.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Dear Lord,

you will take pity on the weak.

We live in a world that looks like a playground for predators. If you look at the economic system, the striving for ever-progressing growth leads to anonymous gigantic companies that hold all the aces. On a far smaller scale, the constantly complaining, bullying colleague always gets her/his way.

Help us to build a humane society together. Give us the strength not to cover up our vulnerable sides. And never ever let us aim for the cheap victory of having taken advantage of our neighbour's weaknesses!

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Dear Lord,
you will rescue our lives from oppression and violence that has so many faces. Heal us - the perpetrators, the victims and everyone in between.
Let us find reconciliation and true justice and peace.

Lead us to the dignity that you have instilled into your children.
Let us arise to a life as your disciples every morning anew,
help us to be radiant with your love,
and let us lift up our eyes when we tend to focus on the downside of things and look about us for the signs of your presence.

Let's pray together:

**Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Peace

Our Saviour Christ is the Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there shall be no end.
Let us give each other a sign of peace.

The Lord be with you,
and also with you.

All honour and praise be yours always and everywhere,
mighty creator, ever living God,
through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord:
for at this time we celebrate your glory
made present in the coming of the Magi.
Send your Holy Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us Christ's body and his blood.

On the night before he died,
Jesus took bread.
He gave thanks, broke it,
and shared it with his disciples, saying:
'This is my body, given for you.
Do this to remember me.'

After they had eaten, he took the cup of wine,
gave thanks, and shared it with his disciples, saying:

'This is my blood, poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.'

So Father, with this bread and this cup
we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.

As you feed us with these gifts,
send your Holy Spirit,
and change us more and more
to be like Jesus our Saviour.
Help us, Father, to love one another,
as we look forward to that day
when suffering is ended,
and all creation is gathered in your loving arms.

We pray together as our Lord has taught us: Our Father....

The giving of Communion

Music during Communion

1. In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan;
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

2. Our God, heav'n cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
heav'n and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

3. Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay;
enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.

4. What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man I would do my part.
Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart, give my heart.

Prayer after communion

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.
Amen

Blessing

Christ, son of Mary, son of God, perfect you in the image of his glory and
gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
come upon you and remain with you always.
Amen

Go in the peace of Christ
Thanks be to God

Music at the end of the service

3. How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming; but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.

4. O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

CCLI Song # 2099056
Phillips Brooks | Ralph Vaughan Williams
© Words: Public Domain; Music: 1906 Oxford University Press
CCLI Licence No. 546960