

twelvebaskets



EPIPHANY B

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

Produced by **twelvebaskets**. Subscription available from **theworshipcloud.com**

Epiphany Sunday - Year B
7th January 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR

169 STF – Come, thou long expected Jesus

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

227 STF – Brightest and best of the sons of the morning OR

190 STF – Angels from the realms of glory

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Hymn:

204 STF – In the bleak midwinter OR

210 STF – Love came down at Christmas

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR

416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

224 STF – As with gladness men of old OR

591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Blessing

The Vine Services are compiled and produced by twelvebaskets.

Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on www.theworshipcloud.com.

Copyright for content is retained by the original author / contributor.

www.theworshipcloud.com

Call to worship

Visiting, travelling, God of migration,
As we begin our journey through 2024,
And celebrate the journey of the Magi to meet the Christ-child,
We ask that you will travel with us,
Today and every day.

Show us the starlight of your grace, we pray

Amen.¹

Hymn:

34 STF – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness OR

169 STF – Come, thou long expected Jesus

Opening Prayers

We are pilgrims on the road,
Brought here through signs, directions, and the spirit,
To worship the newborn Christ.
In the footsteps of the mystics, the prophets, the faithful, and the curious,
We follow.

[Pause]

Come all you travellers, come to this place.
Come as you are: full of joy and sorrow, full anxiety, and pain, full of rage and love.
Bring your burdens, do not set them aside.
We will welcome and love you all the same, and share the burdens, share the emotions.
Come, and rest a while in this community.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

One of our readings today is Ephesians 3:1-12. Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the people of Ephesus, a city in ancient times. In this part of the letter, Paul is talking about a mystery. No, we are not talking about a mystery that you might find on an episode of Dr Who or a detective show. It's a mystery that is reminiscent of the theme of the Methodist Conference this year- 'Hidden Treasure.'

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Annan-Hood

Now then, who this Christmas had a present that was wonderfully wrapped in ribbon and maybe a bow? Give me a wave if you got one of those! You are excited about what's inside, but you can't see it until you unwrap it. In Ephesians 3, Paul is telling us about a mystery that was hidden for a long time, like a present waiting to be opened.

Paul says that this mystery wasn't fully known to people before, but now, through Jesus, it's been revealed. It's like God unwrapped the gift and showed us what's inside. And guess what? The mystery is about how everyone, no matter who they are, can be a part of God's family! The inclusive love of God that says all are welcome. Now that is good news isn't it?

Think about it like this: imagine you have a big family gathering, and you have relatives coming from all over. Some you know well, and some you've never met. In God's family, it's like that, but even more amazing. The mystery is that God wants everyone, from every background and culture, to be part of the divine family.

Paul uses the word "Gentiles" in the passage, which basically means everyone who isn't Jewish. So, he's saying that this mystery is for everyone – Jews, Gentiles, people from all walks of life.

Now, why is this important? Well, it's like God is telling us that we are all important. So, as we go about our days, let's remember that we are part of God's big, diverse, and loving family. And just like any family, we can love and support one another, knowing that we all belong to God.

Let us pray.

Loving and generous parental God, we thank you that because of your love we are a part of your family. Teach us how to share that love and never take it for granted.

Amen.³

Hymn:

227 STF – Brightest and best of the sons of the morning OR

190 STF – Angels from the realms of glory

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Hymn:

204 STF – In the bleak midwinter OR

210 STF – Love came down at Christmas

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection comes from David Hardman, the Methodist Liaison Officer in Jerusalem, part of the Methodist Church in Britain's Connexional Team and a mission partner on behalf of the Church.

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Today to arrive in Bethlehem you have to navigate a checkpoint. The birthplace of Jesus is occupied, as it was when Jesus was born, not by the Roman Empire but by Israel. Across the West Bank, of which Bethlehem is a part, there are numerous checkpoints set up by Israel to control and restrict the movement of Palestinians. The security barrier which in most parts is a 30ft high concrete wall runs for 450 miles across the occupied West Bank and was built by Israel for security reasons, it has been deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice. If the Magi were searching for Jesus today, they would encounter this wall and would have to find a checkpoint to continue their journey.

You may well have seen the cartoons of the wise men on their camels scratching their heads as they look at the wall and try to figure out how they might complete the final leg of their journey! In fact, I have a nativity set from the West Bank in beautiful olive wood that includes a wall. Each year I set up my nativity and place the Magi on the outside of the wall! Each year I pray that the next time I set up my nativity I will not use the wall because it will have been dismantled and that Palestinians will be enjoying their human rights and political self-determination.

As symbolic as it is to draw or place the Magi on one side of the wall and the traditional nativity scene on the other, there is a question as to whether it would actually happen? The truth is in my role as the Methodist Liaison Officer in Jerusalem I can travel much more freely than my Palestinian friends and colleagues, simply because of my UK passport. I suspect that the wise men, in all their finery and obvious wealth, would have had little or no trouble getting through a checkpoint! Privilege opens checkpoints as well as doors.

It certainly opened royal doors for the Magi as they sought an audience with King Herod. Following a star they had observed in the East they are looking for the child 'born king of the Jews'. The Palace seems an obvious place to start but Herod is unaware and has to enquire as to where such a child would be born before he sends the Magi off on the final leg of their journey to Bethlehem. If you are searching for a royal baby then it seems wise to visit a King but as with so much of the nativity story, and in fact the life of Jesus, we see the conventions of the world turned upside down. Jesus, born to be king, is found in an ordinary home.

Jesus is born to a young unmarried mum, away from her home, and spends his first days sleeping in an animal's feeding trough. God chooses to walk in our world not with the powerful or wealthy, the Magi failed to grasp this. There is a real danger that we too can forget that God's incarnation is a challenge to the established norms of the world. Mary understood. On hearing that she was to be the mother of Christ she sang;

'He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.' (Luke 1:51/52)

The Magi soon learnt, after being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they return home by another road. They have gone on a real journey, not just a physical but a spiritual one too. After witnessing the rising of the star in the east and visiting the halls of power they realise that Jesus' birth ushers in God's kingdom in which the powerful predator lies down with the prey in peace (Isaiah 11).

As a theologian friend of mine says: in God's kingdom the lion becomes a vegetarian! It is the powerful and the privileged who give up their power and are 'brought down'

just as 'the lowly are lifted up'. Authority in God's kingdom is not in the hands of rulers, the rich and those in positions of power, it is in the hands of the young, unmarried pregnant mother, the bunch of misfits called to be disciples and in Jesus, a nomadic preacher.

As followers of Christ and citizens of God's kingdom we too are invited to go on this journey. A journey that leads from always trusting those with power in this world to recognising that we look to God in Jesus for our inspiration and our guidance.

A few years ago, I visited the work that is being done with refugees on the island of Lampedusa, work sponsored by the Italian churches. The day I arrived on the island I soon learnt that that morning a boat had sunk just a few miles off the island. You could sense the grief in the voices and body language of those who worked for Mediterranean Hope, but also the sense that they had seen this all before, too many times. I attended the memorial service and saw 14 coffins at the front of Church, the only identification on them were numbers, during the service survivors of the sinking joined us, their grief palpable.

On returning to the UK, I preached many times about my experience and the humanitarian cost of government policies drawing heavily on scripture to illustrate what I believed to be the divine voice. After one service a member of the congregation thanked me for a very moving service and then started a sentence with 'But my newspaper tells me that they are only coming over here for...'.

Don't get me wrong I don't expect everyone to agree with my sermons, and in fact good conversation after a sermon is a really positive thing. However, I do believe that as followers of Christ we must hold the teaching of Christ higher than that of the agenda of any particular newspaper! We do not bow down to politicians, media moguls or influencers on social media – we bow down and serve the Servant King.

The Magi assumed, wrongly, that Christ would be born to the political King, they found him in the little town of Bethlehem. Yet, their journey took them home on a different road, a road that led them away from the places of power. A road that led them to a different understanding of Kingship. A road that allowed them a glimpse of how God's kingdom differs from the human power structures that elevate the wealthy, the privileged and the self-serving to positions of authority and influence.

As we start this New Year, it's a perfect time to challenge ourselves again in our discipleship. Are we prepared to journey on another road and confess that too often we have listen to the voices of this world over and above the voice of God? If so we pledge ourselves to listen to God's voice and to live as 'fully signed up' citizens of God's kingdom.

Questions for conversation and/or for personal reflection:

- Can you see ways in your own life that God's love has turned your world upside down, made you think about your attitudes and change them?
- How best can we as Christians challenge those in authority and let God's voice speak through us?⁴

Hymn:

611 STF – Brother, sister, let me serve you OR
416 STF – There's a wideness in God's mercy

⁴ Reflection written by David Harman

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray.

The worldly wise found you, incarnate God, away from the corridors of power and in the loving arms of a young mum. Hear us now, as we pray for the world you created and the people you lived among.

In the stillness, we pray for all those who exercise power and influence...

[Silence]

May they work tirelessly for justice and peace.

We pray for those who have lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods in conflicts across the world...

[Silence]

May they know your eternal love surrounding them.

We pray for those who are desperately searching for sanctuary...

[Silence]

May they find an unconditional welcome.

We pray for creation as it groans under weight of our greed...

[Silence]

May we give up our domination of this planet and work with creation for renewal.

We pray for those we know and love (and those we ought to love) who are in need of prayer today...

[Silence]

May they know your love, and ours, in their difficult time.

In the name of the son of a teenage girl, we pray to the incarnate deity that God's kingdom may come,
God's will be done,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Gracious God,

Thank you for all that we have received.

Thank you for these gifts here in my hands.

We take a moment now to return them to you, to the work of your kingdom of justice and joy,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by David Harman

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

224 STF – As with gladness men of old OR

591 STF – Let all mortal flesh keep silence

Blessing

You have been blessed, we have been blessed,
You are loved, we are loved.

As you go from this place, go with the Spirit of the God of the Magi in your hearts,
Go inspired to share the blessings of the Christmas season and the love you have
encountered at the manger-side,

Let us share that love with the world and with the people we meet,

In Jesus' name

Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker