



## EPIPHANY 3A

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



## **Order of Service**

Call to worship

**Hymn:**

**175 STF – Light of the world, you stepped into darkness OR**

**678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today**

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

**Hymn:**

**193 STF – Born in the night, Mary's child OR**

**39 STF – Angel voices ever singing**

Readings: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

**Hymn:**

**148 STF – Come, let us with our Lord arise OR**

**255 STF – The Kingdom of God is justice and joy**

Reflections on the readings

**Hymn:**

**673 STF – Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? OR**

**404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart**

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

**Hymn:**

**689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity OR**

**676 STF – Christ, from whom all blessings flow**

Blessing

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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](http://www.theworshipcloud.com).**

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## **Call to worship**

Come, into the darkness, and shine your light O God.  
Come, into the conflict, and bring your peace, O God.  
Come, into the anxiety, and bring your love, O God.

Come Lord Jesus, as we worship you,

Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## **Hymn:**

175 STF – Light of the world, you stepped into darkness OR

678 STF – Come, all who look to Christ today

## **Opening Prayers**

Let us pray,

Here we are bringing with us our hopes and fears, those things that can weigh us down.

If you haven't already, I invite you to close your eyes and take a deep breath.

Help us in this moment to quieten ourselves.

As you breathe, if you can, I would like you to imagine you are sitting in a peaceful garden,  
a calm, nourishing place,  
a place where there is space for honesty and love.

Imagine, if you can, laying down at least some of those things that trouble us, weigh  
heavily upon us.

As we lay things down let us acknowledge where we have gone wrong, the things we  
could have done differently.

God loves us and forgives us... God, help us love and forgive ourselves.

In this moment, let us bring our thanks to God for all that we have and for the opportunities  
we have.

Let us give thanks for this moment, this time to stop, breathe and to start again.

Let us think of things we are grateful for...

Now I know some days it is easier to feel gratitude than others, but I encourage you to find  
at least one thing you can acknowledge in this moment.

Today, in prayer, we meet God in the garden, help us breathe in love and peace and  
breathe out our fear, shame and uncertainty, leaving behind those things that weigh us  
down and trying to walk on more lightly in your world accepting and sharing your love.

Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Call to worship written by Tim Baker

<sup>2</sup> Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

## **We say together the Lord's Prayer**

### **All Age Talk**

*(You might want to consider if you have two local sports teams that are rivals. Arsenal vs Tottenham, Leicester Tigers vs Northampton Saints, for example...) Adapt the text below to your context.*

Imagine two football shirts at the front of the church, in different colours, with various badges, representing different teams.

People can get very passionate about their team, can't they? Sometimes it's fun and light-hearted; however, it can also cause some arguments!

In our Corinthians reading, Paul, the author, has heard that the church is starting to split into "teams":

- "I follow Paul."
- "I follow Apollos."
- "I follow Cephas."
- "I follow Christ."

It's as if they are wearing different shirts and arguing about who is the best Christian. Paul is actively trying to discourage this sort of division. So, he is reminding them that there is only one Saviour, and his name is Jesus, and that we are meant to be one people, not divided.

The thing about being on the same team is that we might wear the same shirt, but we will still look different in it. What this means is that the gospel message is not about uniformity but unity. It is about learning that even in our differences, we are still on the same team with God, and we are to encourage one another.

You might like to look quietly around the room and remember: We are on the same team in Jesus.

Then, if appropriate, turn to someone near you and say: 'We're on the same team!'

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

### **Hymn:**

193 STF – Born in the night, Mary's child OR

39 STF – Angel voices ever singing

**Readings:** Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

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<sup>3</sup> All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

## **Hymn:**

148 STF – Come, let us with our Lord arise OR

255 STF – The Kingdom of God is justice and joy

## **Reflections on the readings**

As we gather today, friends, we meet in the quiet weeks after Epiphany, when the Christmas lights are boxed away, the days are still short, and most of us are settling back into ordinary routines.

It's a time of year that can feel a bit dim, literally and figuratively. The excitement has faded, the weather is grey, and everyday life can feel heavy. And into this time, the lectionary gives us scriptures that speak one simple word over and over again:

Light.

### Isaiah: A Light for Those Who Sit in Darkness

Isaiah begins today by speaking to people who know darkness well:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

We believe he would have been speaking to a region that had been invaded, devastated, traumatised, the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, called in his day "the Galilee of the nations."

It is into those places Isaiah dares to say: Light is coming. Joy is possible. Oppression will not have the last word.

This is not sentimental, it's resistance. It's hope spoken into hard reality.

And if we look at our world today, climate anxiety, wars, political tension, cost-of-living pressures, the loneliness so many carry; Isaiah's words still feel startlingly relevant.

He doesn't pretend the darkness isn't real. He believes the darkness isn't final.

### Psalms 27: A Light That Brings Courage

Psalms 27 opens with that beautiful line: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

Not "I have no fear," but: Light gives me courage. It strengthens the heart of someone who knows what it is to feel threatened, small, or overwhelmed.

Maybe that's exactly what we need in late January, not a pep talk, but a reminder of a light that is steady, patient, and near. A light strong enough to help us take the next small step.

### Matthew: Where the Light Begins

Then Matthew tells us where Jesus begins his ministry: and it's not in Jerusalem, the centre of religious authority, or in Rome, the centre of empire.

It's in Galilee, in the very same region Isaiah mentioned. The place written off as insignificant, mixed, marginal. And Matthew quotes Isaiah deliberately:

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light."

Jesus begins not in the halls of power but on the edges, among fishermen and farmers, the poor and the overlooked, those carrying heavy burdens.

He doesn't start with a grand speech but with an invitation: "Follow me."

Not "understand me" or "agree with me" — just "come with me." Come see how light breaks into ordinary lives.

We sometimes imagine the disciples as stained-glass saints, but they were ordinary workers trying to make ends meet. Matthew tells us Jesus finds them mending nets, fixing things that break, doing their best to get through the week.

And that's where the kingdom begins. Not in perfection or expertise, but in everyday life.

Jesus says to them: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

Which is another way of saying: you will help mend the world. You will help gather those who feel cast aside. You will bring others into the circle of belonging.

And they go.

Not because they understand everything, but because something in Jesus' presence awakens hope.

### Paul: A Gospel Not About Winning, But About Belonging

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is dealing with a community that has split into factions.

Some say, "I belong to Paul," others, "I belong to Apollos," others, "I belong to Cephas," as though faith is a competition. Like the sporting rivalry we talked about earlier in our service.

Paul is heartbroken. He reminds them that the gospel is not an ideology or a party to choose sides in. It is the power of God's love revealed in Christ: love that gathers, reconciles, and heals.

He says: "Has Christ been divided?"

Of course not. And the Church should not be either.

Today, across the UK and around the world, we see division everywhere: social, political, economic, even within families. Paul calls us back to the heart of Christian community: we belong to Christ. Therefore, we belong to one another.

So, what does it mean for us? What does "light" look like in our ordinary January lives?

Maybe it looks like:

- A neighbour checking in on someone isolated.
- Teachers and NHS workers continuing their calling with courage.
- A small act of forgiveness.
- Choosing truth over cynicism.
- Supporting a food bank or community project.
- Being gentle with ourselves in a weary world.
- The light Jesus brings is almost always found in small, human, compassionate actions, not grand gestures, but steady kindness.

In fact, the early Christians often said: the light of Christ travels best through ordinary people.

### Our Calling at the Start of the Year

Jesus says, "Follow me." Not "be extraordinary." Not "get everything right."

Just follow: in your way, at your pace, with your abilities.

The disciples didn't know where the path would lead, but they knew that the light was worth walking toward. And so it is today.

As you walk through these winter weeks, may you trust that Christ is still shining in overlooked places, still calling ordinary people, still healing, still gathering, still mending the world.

The darkness we see around us is real, but the light is real too. And it has already dawned.  
May we walk in it, and may we become it, for one another and for the world God loves.  
Amen.<sup>4</sup>

**Hymn:**

673 STF – Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? OR  
404 STF – God's spirit is in my heart

**Prayers of intercession**

God of light and love,  
you call us to walk in hope even when the world feels shadowed.  
Trusting in your presence,  
we bring you our prayers for the Church, the world, and all in need.

God of all nations,  
your light shines in every land and on every person you have made.

We pray for places where darkness feels overwhelming, for communities caught in war or political insecurity, for Israel and Palestine, for Ukraine, for Sudan, for Yemen, and for all regions where violence and fear shape daily life.

Bless peace builders, negotiators, relief workers,  
and all who risk their own safety for the sake of others.  
Strengthen those working for justice and human rights.  
Bring wisdom to leaders,  
and stir us toward compassion in all we do.

God of peace, hear our prayer.

God whose first gift was light, we pray for this beautiful and fragile earth.  
Where ecosystems are damaged, where oceans choke with plastic,  
where weather is becoming harsher and more unpredictable,  
bring healing and resolve.

Empower communities, governments, and each of us  
to make choices that protect future generations  
and honour the sacredness of all that you have made.

God of life, hear our prayer.

God who walks with us in every season, we pray for our country and neighbourhoods.

Strengthen the fabric of our towns and villages.  
Renew our hope in one another.  
Help us be signs of your light where we live.

God of compassion, hear our prayer.

God who calls ordinary people to extraordinary love, we pray for the Church, that we may reflect the light of Christ in our time.

Where we are divided, unite us.  
Where we have been narrow-minded, open us.

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<sup>4</sup> Reflection written by Tim Baker

Where we are weary, revive us.

Where we have failed to welcome, forgive us and change us.

Bless this church family: those who lead, those who serve quietly,  
those exploring faith, and those longing to feel included and seen.

Make us people who follow Jesus' way of compassion and courage.

God of hope, hear our prayer.

Give us courage and gentleness  
as we walk in your way.

God who calls us beloved, hear our prayer.

Receive all our prayers, spoken and silent, through Jesus Christ,  
the Light who shines in our darkness  
and whom no darkness can overcome.

Amen.<sup>5</sup>

### **We will now take up the offering.**

In this season of sales, of buying and selling, of trade,

We look to you, the God of grace, the God of gift.

Thank you for all we have freely received. We come today to freely give.

Accept these gifts, in Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Hymn:**

689 STF – Summoned by the God who made us rich in our diversity OR

676 STF – Christ, from whom all blessings flow

### **Blessing**

May the Light of Christ  
go before you to guide your steps,  
behind you to give you courage,  
beside you to befriend you,  
and within you to warm your heart.

And may the blessing of God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,  
rest upon you and remain with you,  
today and always.

Amen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

<sup>6</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker

<sup>7</sup> Additional prayers by Tim Baker