

Personal Service 2 January 2022 from Stuart Westerman



2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas leading to Epiphany

Call to Worship [Isaiah Ch60]

'Arise and shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Lift up your eyes and look around. God's people gather together from far and near. They bring their worship and adoration to proclaim the praise of the Lord'

Introduction

As we move from Christmas to Epiphany; from an old year to the new, our memories of times past, challenges of the present and hope for the future come to mind. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas reminds us of God's timeless presence [John Ch1] while Epiphany [Matthew Ch2] brings our search for Jesus, the light in our darkness from the beginning.

Hymn H&P59 [StF55, MP327] Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

Prayer

Together let us worship God who calls us in love, peace and truth as his mystery unfolds on our journey of faith.

Creator God we worship you because in power and might you bring the universe into being and in love and mercy you bring the gift of new life.

In all life's changes you are with us. When we struggle you hold out your hand to us. With unlimited love Your compassion reaches out to us in our deepest need to show us the way. AMEN

Loving God we have celebrated Christmas, praising you for the gift of Jesus who has shown new ways of looking at the world. Now we remember the Wise Men who followed the star, bringing gifts to honour the long-expected king. As they journeyed in faith we pray that our faith will be nurtured to fill us with a spirit of understanding and willingness to approach You. Enable us to live in obedience to your Holy will and at His appearing we may be raised to the eternal light through Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN

Lectionary Readings

Christmas Sunday [2]

Jeremiah ch31 v 7-14 and John ch1 [v1-9] then 10-18

Epiphany

Isaiah ch60 v 1-6 and Matthew ch2 v1-12

Hymn H&P 121 [StF 224, MP 39] As with gladness men of old

Reflection

We have now stepped into a new year with new calendars and diaries to map out

the times ahead. I remember asking my grand nephew [when he was five years old] about his favourite Christmas presents. One simple gift really excited him. His schoolteacher had given every child in his class, a notebook and pen. I asked him what was it for? And I could see the anticipation in his face as he beamed at me – 'I will write down what happens on the page and the next day I will turn the page over. It was his first diary.

As we look forward to this year are we anticipating the pages so eagerly? In John's Gospel we are reminded of God's plan for us all. From the beginning God laid out the book of blank pages as in Genesis and prepared the script through Jesus the Word.

We are in the hands of a God who doesn't wait for New Year resolutions to be fulfilled. We are blessed not because we deserve it but because of God's Word filled with love, truth and light. Firstly in the Christmas readings we are reminded that God's people went astray. The Jeremiah reading prophesies the return of a forgiven people of Judah to God whilst John's Gospel tells the story of John the Baptist calling on the people of Judah to repent and come to Jesus.

The people who have gone astray are living by dog-eared pages of a book where they dare not turn over to a new page highlighted by Jesus. Repeating the old mistakes, unable to move on.

The readings from Epiphany call to people who haven't yet opened the book. The Gospel of Matthew shows how wise men who studied the stars watched and waited for a new beginning to be shown in the skies. Isaiah's prophecies foretold this search. The first verses of chapter 60 Arise be alert Lift up your eyes and be aware. Be prepared to turn the page in the book. Reading the whole of Chapter 60 the journey of not only the wise men but the whole world is written in the story searching for the everlasting light in different ways on new pages.

We revere those wise men sat patiently waiting for astral signs, studying and charting but maybe we do them a disservice. They knew the stars and searched for new beginnings but maybe they knew more from listening to the stories of exiled people of Judah living in these foreign lands. Maybe some of the signs were given life from their living in faith?

Some words from Isaiah Ch60[V19] 'The sun will be no more your light by day nor for brightness shall the moon give you light but the Lord will be your everlasting light and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down nor your moon withdraw itself for the Lord will be your everlasting light and your days of mourning shall be ended.'

That is real encouragement to turn over the page and write another chapter in our lives. Maybe a chance to show and tell the story to others.

Prayer The Lord's Prayer

Prayers of Intercession [based on MWB]

God of surprises, giver of joy and revealer of mysteries Thank you for expectantly calling us to the right path. You aren't silent but choose to reveal yourself in the

majesty of creation, the promise of scripture , the guidance of Your Holy Spirit supremely in Jesus the Word made flesh.

Unlooked for Christ comes to shepherds watching their sheep through the long dark night. He comes with the glory of angels song and in the humility of the manger.

Loving God we pray for our community, our nation and our world. In the midst of our everyday lives, surprise us with glimpses of glorious humble love at the heart of our existence.

Searched for Christ comes to the wise and powerful, star-led to Bethlehem seeking a king. He comes ,child of Mary, crowned with meekness, worthy of every gift

Loving God we pray for the leaders of the world ,the people of power influence. Guide them with your light to the true wisdom of justice,peace and freedom to respect every human life.

Lord God we pray for your church in all the world. Unite us by your Spirit and make us faithful witnesses to the hope we have in you.

Prayed for ,Christ comes to all crying out in pain and loneliness. He comes baptized, at one with us, our saviour, healer ,friend.

Loving God we pray for those whose lives are hard and painful or whose existence sorrowful, bitter or empty. In their need may they know your healing touch, reaching out to comfort, strengthen and restore.

Unlooked for and searched for ,Living God come to us now as you have come to people of every age.

We thank you for all who have reflected the light of Christ. Help us ,with them, to follow their example and bring us ,with them to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn H&P79 [StF181] Of the Fathers love begotten

### Blessing [Pauls letter to the Ephesians

May Christ give us strength by his spirit

May Christ dwell in our hearts as we are rooted and grounded in love

May we be able to see that the height, depth, length and breadth of Gods love which is beyond our understanding.

May we know the love of Christ and experience the fullness of God for he can achieve in us more than we could ever ask or imagine.

May we as His Church give Him the glory for ever and ever.

AMEN