

**Week of Prayer for
Christian Unity
2022**



**Daily Prayers
Churches Together in Ramsbottom
#doyouknowHim?**

The material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022 has been prepared by the Churches of the Middle East.

The theme this year is “We Saw His Star in the East...”

The story of the Magi visiting the Holy Family in Bethlehem is one very familiar to us. Indeed, we have recently celebrated Christmas, the Feast of Incarnation and Epiphany. The Magi have sometimes been seen as a symbol of the world’s diversity—different religions and cultures—that come to pay homage to the Christ-child. The story might therefore represent the unity of creation that God desires. The Magi travel from far away countries, and represent diverse cultures, yet they are driven by the same hunger to see and know the new born king and are gathered in the little house in Bethlehem in the simple act of giving homage. In this we can find a metaphor for Christian unity: that is, of different Christian peoples drawn together in their common search to recognise Christ, to know him and to worship him and witnessing to a wider need for unity and to overcome injustice.

The text has been chosen by the churches of the Middle East, the history of which was, and still is, characterised by conflict and strife. The region has seen a series of bloody wars and the rise of Islamic extremism. The story of the Magi also contains many dark elements, most particularly Herod’s orders to massacre all the children in Bethlehem who were two years old and under. The cruelty of these narratives resonates with the long history and difficult present of the Middle East.

It was in the Middle East that the Word of God took root and bore fruit. And it was from this East that the apostles set out to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The Middle East has countless Christian witnesses and martyrs. And yet now, the very existence of the Christian community is threatened in these difficult times.

In this context Christians are called to seek the new born king, the king of gentleness, peace and love. But where is the star that leads the way to him? It is the mission of the Church to be the star that lights the way to Christ who is the light of the world. Yet divisions dim the light of Christian witness and obscure the way, preventing others from finding their way to Christ.

The Covid-19 pandemic, the economic crisis that has followed and the failure of political, economic and social structures to protect the weakest and the most vulnerable have underlined the global need for a light to shine in the darkness. The star that shone in the East, two thousand years ago, still leads us to the manger, to where Christ was born. It draws us to where the Spirit of God is alive and active.

After encountering the Saviour and worshipping him together, the Magi return to their countries by a different route, having been warned in a dream. The communion we share in our prayer together must inspire us to return to ourselves, our churches and our world by new ways. But what does this mean in practice? Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to humankind, especially the poorest, the weakest and those marginalised. It requires from churches transparency and accountability in dealing with the world, and with each other. This means that churches need to cooperate to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displaced, to relieve the burdened and to build a just and honest society. This is a call for churches to work together so that we can all build a good future according to God's heart, a future in which all human beings can experience life, peace, justice and love.

Included in this leaflet are the meditations and prayers written by the Churches of the Middle East, with suggested prayer topics for our churches in Ramsbottom.

Please join in because it is through prayer that we connect with the living God.



Day 1—18 January 2022

"We observed his star in the East." (Matthew 2:2)

Prayer meeting on zoom—see back cover for details

Psalms 139:1-10 Your right hand shall hold me fast

2 Timothy 1:7-10 This grace ... has now been revealed through ... Jesus Christ

Reflection

In this fragile and uncertain world, we look for light. We look for the good within ourselves, but often we are so overwhelmed by our weakness that hope fails us. Our confidence rests in God, who in wisdom, enables us to hope for his mercy. We are surprised when it comes in human form: Christ is the light in our midst. God's gift to us is a 'spirit of power and love'. We are drawn forward on the way to this perfect light by God's Holy Spirit, not by relying on our own strength and ability.

In the midst of darkness, the star from the East penetrates the depths of darkness that separates us from one another. The star's light continues to shine and to change the face of history. Throughout the ages, by the lives of Christ's followers, the world has come to know the hope that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Risen One continues to shine, like a beacon guiding all this perfect light and overcoming the darkness which separates us from one another.

The desire to overcome the darkness that separates us compels us to pray and work for Christian unity.

We pray for

Ramsbottom Community Church.

Emmanuel Church, Holcombe.

Our local vision for working together in Ramsbottom.

Worldwide unity as we tackle the effects of Covid-19.

We pray together

Creator of light,

Illumine our path by the light of Christ who moves before us and leads us.

May he be a beacon for our pilgrimage, enlightening us and dwelling within us.

We thank you for the gift of that unfading Star, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Heal our divisions and draw us closer to the Light that we may find our unity in Him.

Amen

Question

How have you sought “the light” in the midst of darkness?

Go and do

Visit the website of Embrace the Middle East and see what actions you can take to be in solidarity with Christians of the Middle East.

Day 2—19 January 2022

“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2)

Jeremiah 23:1- He shall reign as king and deal wisely

Philippians 2:5-11 Who ... did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.

Reflection

Jeremiah denounces the bad leadership of the kings of Israel who divided and scattered the people, a leadership that destroyed nations and drove their citizens into exile. In contrast, the Lord promises a shepherd king who will execute justice and righteousness in the land and gather the flock as one.

Only in Christ have we seen the example of a leader truly after God’s heart. In him we encounter a loving, humble servant who does not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. He comes to serve, rather than be served, and his followers are called to do the same.

Today, the Middle East is experiencing the loss of its people to exile as righteousness and justice are becoming rare commodities. Yet leaders have a responsibility to bring together rather than to scatter or divide. The more faithfully Christians emulate the servant leadership of Christ, the more division in both the world and the church will be overcome. As we work for righteousness, justice and peace for all, we witness humbly to the shepherd-king, and draw others into his presence.

We pray for

St Philip's Church, Stubbins.

Edenfield Methodists as they move to Christ Church.

Our clergy, ministers and church leaders.

World leaders that they show faith and integrity.

We pray together

Just and righteous God,

Help us to seek our Lord Jesus Christ not in the palaces of the powerful, but in the humble manger.

May we emulate him in his meekness and become servants to each other in obedience to you.

Amen

Question

Which Christian leader do you admire for the ability to inspire unity and a concern for justice? What qualities enable that person to lead effectively?

Go and do

Consider how you can best exercise your personal leadership this week to help the cause of unity.

Day 3—20 January 2022

“When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” (Matthew 2:3)

Psalm 2:1-10

Why do the nations conspire...?

2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5 But the Lord is faithful, he will strengthen you

Reflection

Christ’s coming disturbs the way of the world. He comes in humility, denouncing the evil of injustice and oppression that accompanies ambition for power, wealth and status. Jesus calls for a change of heart and a transformation of life, which will bring liberation from all that which dehumanises. This creates disturbance precisely because he rocks the boat of those who seek only their own interests and neglect the common good. But for those who work for peace and unity, Christ’s coming brings the light of hope.

We are invited to commit ourselves to act constructively to make justice a reality, acknowledging where we have strayed from God’s ways of justice and peace. Then the answer to our prayer for Christian unity becomes visible as others recognise in us Christ’s presence in the world. We can bring the light of hope to those living in the darkness of political unrest, social poverty and structural discrimination.

The Good News is that God is faithful, always strengthening and protecting us, inspiring us to work for the good of others, especially the victims of oppression, hatred, violence and pain.

We pray for

Greenmount URC.

St Paul's Church, Ramsbottom.

Our local foodbanks and charities working to help the homeless.

Those who work for peace and reconciliation.

We pray together

Lord, you led us out of darkness to hope in Jesus.

Unite us in our commitment to establish your reign of love, justice and peace, bringing light to those living in the darkness of despair and disillusionment.

Shine your light upon us and surround us with the warmth of your love.

Lift us up to you, so that our lives may glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

Question

When have you been disturbed into doing what was right?

Go and do

Take time today to sit in stillness and discern what injustice most disturbs your conscience, spend time praying, researching and planning how you can take action about it.

Day 4—21 January 2022

“And you Bethlehem ... are by no means least.” (Matthew 2:6)

Micah 5:2-5a, 7-8 From you shall come forth ... one who is to rule in Israel

1 Peter 2:21-25 Now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your soul

Luke 12:32-40 Do not be afraid, little flock

Reflection

Today we consider why God chooses to act in and through seemingly insignificant places and people, and what he does with them. These are not new questions, yet they continue to challenge us. The prophet Micah speaks directly to Bethlehem and predicts its greatness as the home of the shepherd who will defend God's people. The first letter of Peter tells people who have already begun to identify Jesus Christ with the Messiah that he is the shepherd who willingly suffers to save the flock. The Gospel of Luke reassures the “little flock” of Christ's followers that they need have no fear, because God has promised them the Kingdom.

We receive these messages of consolation, directed to particular people at a particular time, in the context of our own concerns and longing. They invite us to take part in God's transformation of inequality, violence and injustice. They call on us to be politically aware; to be locally ready to make our churches little Bethlehems where Christ can be born in generosity and hospitality; to recognise ourselves as a “little flock”, unimportant perhaps in the eyes of the world, but with a value and a vocation in the great mystery of salvation.

We pray for

St Mary's Church, Hawkshaw.

Holcombe Brook Methodists.

Our churches that they are places of welcome to all.

Those who are investigating a new calling.

We pray together

Good Shepherd, the fragmentation of your flock grieves the Holy Spirit. Forgive our weak efforts and slowness in the pursuit of your will.

Give us wise shepherds after your own heart, who recognise the sin of division and those who will lead our churches with righteousness and holiness, to unity in you.

Amen

Question

How might our local churches become Bethlehems—places where Christ can be born, welcomed and honoured?

Go and do

Bring the fears that keep you in division from other traditions before God in prayer.

Day 5—22 January 2022

“Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising.” (Matthew 2:9)

Psalm 121 I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?

Matthew 2:7-10 Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising

Reflection

Again and again, the scriptures tell us how God walks with us. The path may not always be straight : sometimes we are led to retrace our steps, sometimes to return by a different route. But in all our journeying in life, we can be confident that God, who neither “sleeps nor slumbers”, is with us when we slip or fall.

Even in the greatest darkness, God’s light is with us. Most perfectly, in the fullness of time, God sends Jesus Christ, who is the guiding light for all nations, the glory of God in the world, the source of divine light and life.

The way into unity with one another, into closer union with Christ, is not always clear. In our attempts to build unity ourselves it is all too easy to lose sight of this fundamental message of the scriptures: that God does not abandon his people even in their failures and divisiveness.

This is God’s message of hope for the whole world. As the story of the Magi reminds us, God guides people of all kinds, by the light of the star, to where Christ, the light of the world, is to be found.

We pray for

Dundee URC.

St Andrew's Church, Ramsbottom.

Our work with children and young people.

Those we know who need to know that God is with them.

We pray together

God, our guide, you sent the star to lead the Magi to your only begotten Son.

Fill us with confidence that you are walking with us.

Open our eyes to your Spirit, and encourage us in our faith, so that we may confess that Jesus is Lord, and worship him as the Magi did in Bethlehem.

Amen

Question

When did you feel or see God's guidance in your life? What was that like?

Go and do

Take time to star gaze. Let your eyes settle on an unfading star and pause in reverence and prayer before the Creator of light.

Day 6—23 January 2022

“They saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.” (Matthew 2:11)

United service 6.30 p.m. at St Mary’s Hawkshaw

See back cover for details

Psalm 84 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

Matthew 28: 16-20 When they saw him, they worshipped him

Reflection

When the Magi from their far away countries arrived at Bethlehem and saw the child with his mother, they worshipped him. In the presence of this revelation of God among us, eyes were cast down and knees bent. Similarly, when the disciples saw the risen Christ on the mountain in Galilee, they were amazed and troubled. Yet they worshipped him.

Do we see? Are we amazed? Are we truly worshipping? How many times do we remain blind to God’s presence? How can we worship in truth if we do not really see first? In our narrow vision, too often we see only our tangled disagreements, forgetting that God’s saving grace is to all, and that we share in one Spirit who draws us into unity. Often in pride we follow human laws and traditions, disregarding the love we are called to share as one people justified by Christ’s blood.

As communities enlivened by the Holy Spirit, we are called to walk together, offering homage as one people. The Spirit of compassion guides us to each other and only by following this guide will we be able to worship in spirit and truth.

We pray for

Edenfield Parish Church.

Trinity Grace Church.

Our united services.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not free to worship openly.

We pray together

Compassionate God, in your mercy, remove the scales from our eyes and lead us to repent and to worship you.

In the midst of our sorrow and despite the depth of our sin, give us the capacity to love you with all our hearts.

As we journey together with one heart and mind, may we glorify you in the Spirit's fellowship and witness to those around us.

Amen

Question

What are you doing as part of your own worship to pray for the worldwide church?

Go and do

Find and join an online service from a church of a different tradition. Join in this act of worship and reflect on what riches God has shown you through this different experience of worship together.

Day 7—24 January 2022

“Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)

Hosea 6:1-6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice

Matthew 6:19-21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

Reflection

The prophet Hosea is known for his cry for justice and his love of overriding religious ritual and regulations. We are called to make a treasure of our expression of love and our work for justice and to let that be the offering that we place before the manger. We know that God does not want our burnt offerings or riches, but rather our loving hearts, filled with mercy, truly penitent and desiring change.

Let us then prepare the gift of a heart full of love. Kneeling in worship requires hearts that are contrite and that are obedient to the One we serve. This obedience revives, heals and reconciles everything that is broken or wounded in us, around us, and among us as Christians.

Unity is the gift offered to us by Christ. We grow in communion as we share the graces our different traditions have received, acknowledging that the source of all our gifts is the Lord.

We pray for

St Joseph's R C Church.

Our joint outreach projects and pastoral care teams.

Those who live in poverty.

We pray together

Lord God, through your prophets you have called us to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with you.

In Christ, you have shown us what that looks like.

Through your Holy Spirit you enable us to hear your words, to follow Christ's example and to live as his disciples.

So, as we gather at the manger, heal our wounds, reconcile our divisions and hold us together in your love.

Amen

Question

How do you consider the importance of church as a place from which to call for social justice?

Go and do

Consider an issue of social justice that you have not been involved with previously and take time to find out more.

Day 8—25 January 2022

“They left for their own country by another road.” (Matthew 2:12)

Prayer meeting on zoom—see back cover for details

Psalm 16 You show me the path of life

Matthew 11:25-30 Because you have hidden these things

Reflection

We do not know what the wise men thought—they were experts in astronomy and navigation—when they were warned to return by another road. They may well have been very confused, but the same light that illumined their journey showed them that there was another road, another possibility. They were called to change direction.

We often find ourselves bound by our familiar ways of doing things and of seeing the world. When these ways or roads are closed, we wonder how to proceed. We have to trust that the Everlasting One who gave us the light, can always find a way forward when our ways and paths are blocked. A fresh start is always possible when we are willing and open to the work of the Spirit.

As churches we look to the past and find illumination, and we look to the future in search of new ways so that we can continue to shine the light of the Gospel as we journey by another way, together.

We pray for

Christ Church.

Emmanuel Church Centre.

Our involvement in Festival Manchester, that many will come to know Jesus as Lord.

A new start in Jesus for those who are stuck in patterns of addiction or bad habits.

We pray together ...

Gracious God, when we know only one way and we think we must return to it, when we think all roads are blocked, and we fall into despair, we always find you there, creating a new unexpected path before us.

Teach us to trust that you will always lead us back to you, and forward in unity together.

Amen

Question

How does it feel when your familiar ways or traditions are challenged?

Go and do

Travel familiar routes by another way, maybe walk 50% more slowly whilst you carry out your errands today; what do you notice? How do you see things differently?

All are welcome at:

Christ Church Zoom Weekly Prayer Meeting

Tuesday 18 January at 19.00

contact

johnleyland@hotmail.co.uk for login details

United Service at St Mary's Hawkshaw

Sunday 23 January at 18.30

This service will include displays of activities that Churches Together has been engaged in over the years and will also look forward to the 2022 Manchester Festival.

Note the change of venue from Emmanuel Church Centre

Christ Church Zoom Weekly Prayer Meeting

Tuesday 25 January at 19.00

Contact

johnleyland@hotmail.co.uk for login details