



Heacham Parish Church



**Sunday Service 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 - Epiphany**

*Adrian plays 'Wassail Song' by Noel Rawsthorne*

*"God bless you and keep you a happy New Year"*

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

As we gather in our homes, together yet apart, we meet in the presence of God as we celebrate Epiphany.

O God, you establish the heavens and the earth,

**they shine with your glory.**

You gather the nations to worship,

**they see the brightness of your dawn.**

You call us saints and children,

**our hearts rejoice in your love.**

The mystery of God's love is revealed in Jesus.

**We have faith in him.**

Gold for a king, shining into the darkness of our broken world.

Incense for a priest, offering prayer for our fallen humanity.

Myrrh for our redemption, dying and living, a sacrifice of love.

We worship you, child of Bethlehem.

**Amen.**

*Prayer of Preparation*

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Prayers of Penitence*

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with forgiveness for all, and God will forgive us if we confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Eternal God, we thank you for carrying us through the changes of time to the beginning of another year. Forgive us the wrong we have done in the year that is past and help us to use the rest of our days to your glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

God be gracious to us and bless us.

Lord, have mercy. **All: Lord, have mercy.**

May your ways be known on the earth, and your saving power among the nations.

Christ, have mercy. **All: Christ, have mercy.**

You, Lord, have made known your salvation.

Lord, have mercy. **All: Lord, have mercy.**

May God, who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour, forgive you your sins and make you holy to serve Him in the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song: **Hark the herald angels sing**

sung & played by Adrian, Judith, Sue, Val, Christina, and June

Hark! the herald angels sing  
"Glory to the new-born King:  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with the angelic hosts proclaim:  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem".

*Hark! the herald angels sing  
"Glory to the new-born King".*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of the Virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail the incarnate Deity.  
Pleased as man with us to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

*Hark! the herald angels sing  
"Glory to the new-born King".*

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that we no more may die,  
born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.

*Hark! the herald angels sing  
"Glory to the new-born King".*

*Bible Reading:*    **Matthew 2: 1-12**    read by Sue Strickland

**A Reflection,**    **from Pip Lawrence**

Last time I had to look at this Epiphany reading, I confess that my heart really was not in it. I have preached on many an Epiphany Sunday. It is the Sunday most vicars take off after the exertions of Christmas. I thought I had probably exhausted any train of thought, or any new revelations. This Epiphany, as I came to look at these very familiar verses I feel very differently. The familiarity of the words, the constancy of the story, the whole extraordinary episode made me rejoice again.

Why? Well I guess because the last year has been so very different and very unsettling. So painful for some, and completely life-limiting for us all. So, it was deeply comforting to plant myself in the nourishing soil of the familiar. The tried and true, the unchanging story of the Magi. The

eternal, century-spanning, search for Jesus. It has thrilled me, reminding me of hearing the story for the first time as a child. It has made me think anew of that special journey millennia ago. A time when no-one had to wear a mask, or do the pavement dance (dodge' em fashion), or socially distance, or drench their hands in antibacterial gel. I gave thanks that no matter what happens, even a pandemic, we can all still search for Jesus. We can all go on our own journey to meet the divine, despite being only human, and as the word says: "fallen short of the glory of God".

I am certain that the events of the Magi - the setting out to follow a star, which signified the advent of the king of the Jews, its twists and turns, the arrival in Bethlehem - is as familiar to you as it is to me. I am sure that you have heard countless times about the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The significance of them, how the Magi worshipped before presenting them. The dream that warned them to return by a different route. I have preached on all these things and, as I have said, thought I had exhausted my thoughts. Until I looked afresh and these words really struck me: "we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him".

I thought about that star, 'His star', and I realised, for me it had only really been a peripheral part of the event. As with most things it held a lot more significance than I had previously realised. Why should anyone be surprised that God used a light to bring the Magi to the author of light, the Light of the World? I recalled how it says in Job, when the foundations of the world were laid, that: "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy". Also in the Psalms we are told: "He determines the number of stars and calls them each by name." And Peter speaks of "the morning star rising in our hearts". God created stars, they bring us such joy as we gaze upon them on a clear and starry night. They led the Magi to Jesus. How exciting is that?!

Stars are used by the Lord to bless us, not in a horoscope-type of way, but as a reminder of the light that shines in the darkness. As a village we have been putting-up stars and been reminded of the Light of the World.

The Magi followed the star and it led them to them to Jesus. What about us today? Have we followed our metaphorical star and found the Lord for ourselves? Is the author of light the king of our hearts? Is he enthroned there? Above anything else? If He is, then we are truly blessed and we

will be able to recognise that if He is for us nothing can stand against us. He has promised that those who follow Him have the right to be with Him where He is. Now I do not know if there will be stars in heaven, but I know that the "bright morning star" abides there because Revelation tells us so.

Today as we mark the Sunday of Epiphany, and also the first Sunday of a new calendar year, we can all look back and see how the Lord has been with us in a difficult year. We can look forward, with hope, even knowing that everything changes, except for the Lord. He is, and was, and will be, our constancy, our anchor, our foundation, our help, and our guide. He called the Magi to follow His star; and this year He calls us all in different ways to do different things. Whether we are called to starlight paths or otherwise we can be assured that He will light our paths.

**Thank you Jesus. Amen.**

*Prayers of Intercession* led by Lynda Swain

"Star of Silver sweep across the skies. Show where Jesus in the manger lies." (from See Him Lying on a Bed of Straw)

"The Wise men saw where the baby was born and they saw that his name was Jesus." (from The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy)

Thank you, Lord, that we have been surrounded by lights and stars in our homes and around the village this Christmas. May the brightness of the lights, and the joy of celebrating Your birth chase away the darkness of this winter season. We pray that, amid the tinsel and glitter, we would also see the Christ-Child born in a stable, laid in a manger. That we would see this One born to be our Saviour, the One who came to be **Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us.**

"And by the light of that same star, three wisemen came from country far, to seek for a King was their intent, and to follow the star wherever it went. This star drew nigh to the north-west, o'er Bethlehem it took its rest, and there it did both stop and stay right o'er the place where Jesus lay." (from The First Nowell)

Lord Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we pray for those seeking to find and know the hope, peace, joy, and love of Jesus in their life today.

We pray for all those who have heard the Christmas story and are on the journey, to seek and discover the new-born King for themselves. Help us to be willing to share the good news with our families, our friends, and our neighbours. Give us a renewed boldness and a willingness to share our story of our own journeys of faith.

Give us strength to be faithful in our journey; that we would have perseverance and commitment to finding and knowing the Christ-child. In our moments of doubt or fear, in times of weakness and despair, remind us Lord that we are not alone.

### **Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us.**

“If I were a wise man, I would do my part, yet what can I give him: give my heart”. (from In the Bleak Midwinter)

We come before you, Lord Jesus, with thankful hearts acknowledging the many blessings we have, both materially and spiritually, at this time and in this place.

We thank you for those who have worked hard through the past year – the care staff, the NHS workers, for teachers, and for the many others who have kept essential services going through the tough times of 2020.

We thank you for our Church building that has stood over the centuries as a witness to you and your people of faith. For the generations who have gone before us; who have served you wholeheartedly and with generosity of spirit.

We pray now for all those in ministry at St Mary’s - for the many who have contributed their time, talents, and skills to enable us to meet online or in church; especially those who have cleaned and prepared the building, or those with technological abilities.

Help us Lord to be willing to serve You in whatever way You call us; that we would lay our lives before You in thanksgiving and worship – show us what the gold, frankincense, and myrrh may be in our lives so that we can lay them before You.

May all those who share in Your work, know You more and more deeply as **Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us.**

“Lo, star-led Chieftains, Magi Christ adoring, offer him incense, gold and myrrh; we to the Christ-child bring our hearts’ oblations.”

(from O Come All Ye Faithful)

"Sages, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar: seek the great Desire of Nations; ye have seen his natal star."

(from Angels from the Realms of Glory)

Oh Lord - we may not have Magi or sages but we do need those with wisdom to lead and guide us, for those who rule over us to have sense and awareness of what is needed in these challenging and changing times. Lord we ask that we will be a nation governed by justice, mercy, and peace.

We pray for our Queen - that she and her family will have strength and a faith in you as they carry out their roles and duties. We pray too for strength and wisdom for all those in positions of authority and leadership within the Church, as they seek to lead and speak out for the values of the Kingdom of God.

Help us all to worship you in Spirit and in Truth wherever we are, at home or in a church building, with others or when alone. Thank you that you are **Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us.**

"The Holy Light in Judah's skies calls sages from afar. The hope of Kings they recognise which in the virgin mother's eyes, outshines the guiding star." (from Arise to Greet the Lord of Light)

Lord we need the light of your hope amid the darkness of this season. For many this has become a time of pain and despair, of grief and loss. We stop to consider those who are suffering at this time from sickness of body, mind, or spirit. Lord we lift them up to you, we name those who need your touch right now. (*A short silence.*)

Lord we pray for all those who need the light of hope in their life; a hope that, as the hymn says: "outshines that Star" that led those wisemen to Jesus. We ask the One who is greater than us to come and draw alongside those in need at this time and may He make himself known to them as **Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us.**

"O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light." (from We three Kings of Orient are)

"As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold, As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward beaming bright; so most gracious Lord may we ever more be led to thee."

(from As with Gladness Men of Old)

And so, Lord Jesus, as we move into this New Year with its expectations, uncertainties, and even fears; help us to hold fast to your sure and certain hope. Lead us Lord closer to you day by day. Let us not be distracted in our journey that carries on beyond the events of the stable and manger, beyond the shepherds and angels, beyond the Magi and their gifts. As we continue our journey through this New Year of 2021 may we keep close to You, as You hold us in Your hands. May we continue to be seekers - trusting and faithful to your call. Steer us through these months to come that we may have the peace of knowing  
**Jesus our Emmanuel – God with us. Amen.**

**We pray together the Lord's Prayer,** led by Colin Ross

Song: **We three kings of Orient are**

sung & played by Hilary, Rosie, Colin, Karen, and Terry

We three kings of Orient are,  
bearing gifts we travel afar,  
field and fountain, moor and mountain,  
following yonder star.

*O star of wonder, star of night,  
star with royal beauty bright,  
westward leading, still proceeding,  
guide us to the perfect light.*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,  
gold I bring to crown him again,  
King forever, ceasing never,  
over us all to reign.

*O star of wonder...*

Frankincense to offer have I;  
incense owns a Deity nigh;  
prayer and praising all men raising,  
worshipping God on high.

*O star of wonder...*

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

*O star of wonder...*

Glorious now, behold Him arise;  
King and God and sacrifice.  
Heaven sings out Alleluia,  
'Amen' the earth replies.

*O star of wonder...*

*Blessing*

As we remember the Holy Family, far from home:

**we thank you, Lord, for our homes and families.**

As we think of the wise men, following the star and journeying so far to find you:

**we give thanks that we can find you everywhere.**

As we think of the gifts they laid before you - gold, frankincense and myrrh:

**we thank you for all the many blessings of our lives,  
and we lay before you the treasure of our hearts,  
that we may love you and seek to do your will. Amen.**

*Dismissal:*

God of the journey give us grace to travel onwards hopefully; give us patience to overcome each obstacle; give us boldness to speak of you as our companion; give us hope, that we will see you at our journey's end; in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Christ Our Lord, to whom kings bowed down in worship and offered gifts, reveal to you His glory and pour upon you the riches of His grace; and the blessing of Almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and those you love now and always. **Amen**

*Adrian plays and Jean sings: 'How brightly shines the morning star with mercy beaming from afar, the host of heaven rejoices!' by Egil Hovland*

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**Notices**

**Church building closed**

I am sorry to tell you that we have decided that we need to keep the church building closed for the next few weeks, apart from funerals. The PCC will review this at a meeting on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January - when we hope to have a plan for re-opening, having had a re-think and re-done all the risk assessments.

It has been a tough decision to make; as it goes against the grain to remain closed when we are legally allowed to open for both private

prayer and public acts of worship. Tier 4 rules state: "we must stay at home and not mingle with anyone not in our household or bubble". We need to stick to both the rules, and the spirit of the rules. Alongside this the rising rate of infections locally is very concerning, and the pressure on the QEH is immense, with a huge increase in Covid-19 patients. The new strain of Covid-19 seems to be passed on much more easily too, so reducing our contact with other people is vital.

We have, as a church, been acting cautiously and carefully since March, following the rules and ensuring that we care for our neighbours and each other. We will still continue to be, and do, church with daily prayer on Zoom, online worship, paper service copies, and community care and outreach.

*(Non-internet folk please note below – new development re participation)*

Also for the next three Sundays (3rd, 10th, and 17th January) we will, instead of an 'in church' service, have three 'ZOOM church services' at 10am - **Heacham Parish Church on Zoom!** These will be what we would have done in church but via Zoom. You can access the service by computer, smartphone, or by (ordinary) telephone as a verbal only participant. This week it will be an Epiphany service followed by the opportunity to chat with each other afterwards; for those who wish to do so. The online and paper services will continue and, of course, we know that we can worship and pray anywhere at anytime.

## **Heacham Parish Church on Zoom - Sunday 3rd January**

**10am** (access from 9.50am)

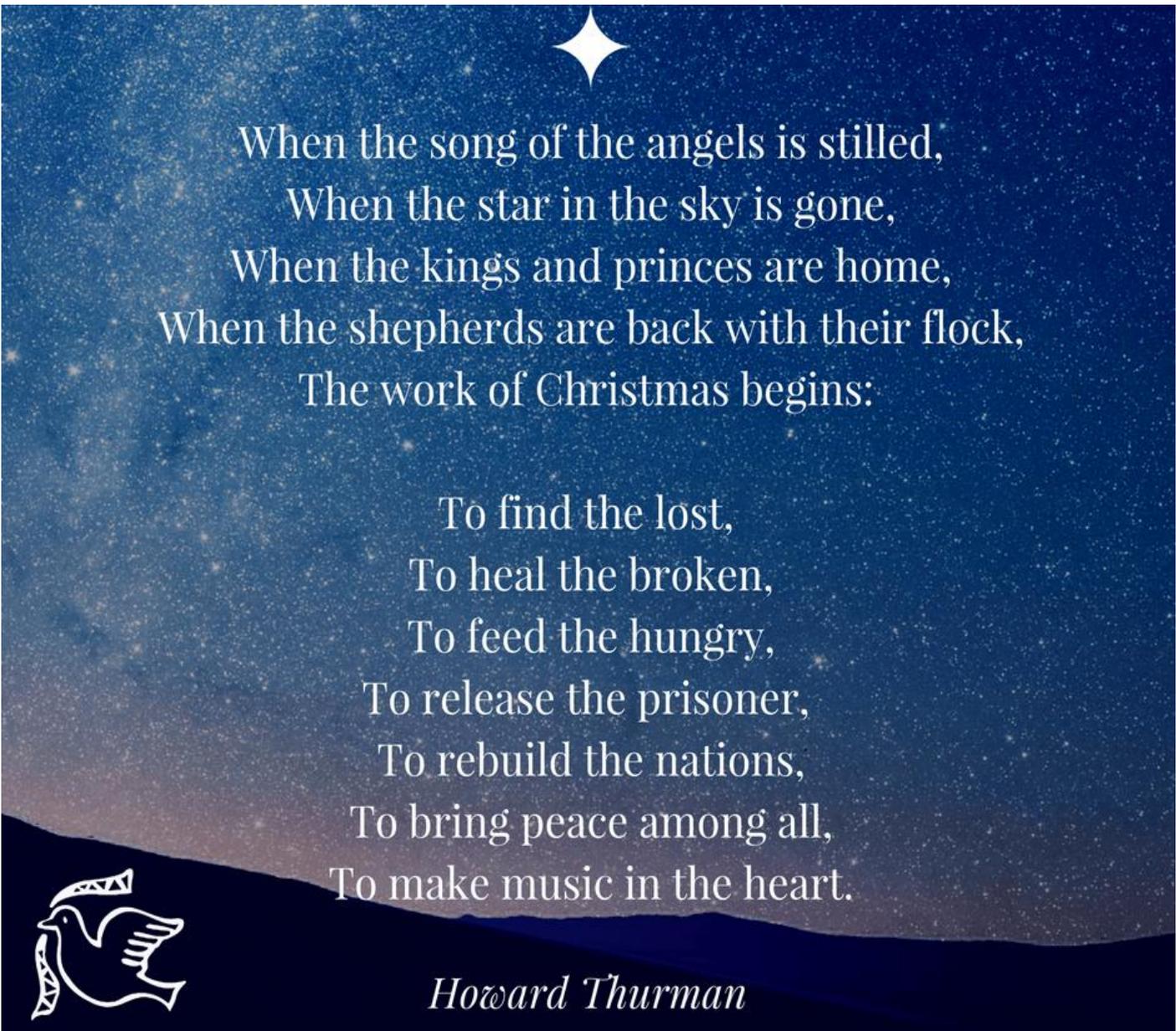
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88284288324?pwd=K2UzeUpnciRDN1ozSUdJY25vWnVBZz09>

Meeting ID: 882 8428 8324 Passcode: 131974

Or by telephone: call 0203 901 7895

Meeting ID: 882 8428 8324 Passcode: 131974

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The background of the image is a dark blue night sky filled with stars. At the top center, there is a bright, four-pointed star. Below the main text, there is a silhouette of a dove in flight, carrying an olive branch in its beak. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of a landscape or hills.

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among all,  
To make music in the heart.

*Howard Thurman*

At this time of year, I always re-read this poem. I am sure I have shared it with you all before! 2020 has been a really tough year but we, as a church, have prayed for, supported, and cared for our village community and each other. We have, in recent weeks, encouraged people to 'Light up Heacham with Stars' to bring joy and light... we will continue to do that in the coming weeks....even with the church building closed...

We have been..... 'doing the work of Christmas' ..... all year!

*Veronica*