

# St Francis High Heaton

## Worship - Community – Service

**4<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

***The Epiphany (transferred from 6<sup>th</sup>)***

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The twelfth Day of Christmas 6<sup>th</sup> January is the feast of the Epiphany, but we can transfer it to the nearest Sunday so we celebrate it on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January this year! “Epiphany” is from a Greek word ἐπιφανός meaning *manifest* or *appearing* and it marks the coming of the magi, or *wise ones* as the Greek of the New Testament has it. We don’t know how many wise ones came to the cradle, although they are usually counted by their gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. They are also held to have come from ‘Persian lands afar’, possibly modern-day Iran, and it is a joy that today we have people from Iran as part of our worshipping congregation. The Magi are thought perhaps to have been Zoroastrian scholars, astrologers, or perhaps more correctly astronomers, cartographers of the night sky, who noticed the appearance of an unusually bright star that led them on a journey to Bethlehem. The Feast of the Epiphany is thus a moment in the birth narrative where the infant Jesus is presented to gentiles, people from outside the Jewish nation, thus indicating right at the start of the gospel that the Good News is for people of every race and language, every culture and national identity. The difficult truth of the Christian story is that from the time when nation states adopted Christianity as their official religion (starting with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 312), the way in which Christianity has been presented has reflected the culture and identity of the nation doing the conquering, rather than any striving to focus on the spirituality at the heart of the matter. It is for this reason, for example, that the Anglican communion (of which we are a part) is generally concomitant with the extent of the British empire, rather than having recommended itself merely by its distinctive qualities.

In his book *Christ and Culture*, the theologian Richard Niebuhr identified five ways in which Christians relate to their surrounding society. These range from total withdrawal to active engagement. The first is *Christ Against Culture*, seeing human culture as inherently sinful and opposed to Christ. The early church martyrs or modern-day Anabaptists such as the Amish in North America are examples of this and they advocate for withdrawing from secular society to maintain a pure, separate Christian community. The second of Niebuhr's paradigms is the *Christ of Culture* which is at the opposite extreme, seeing no inherent conflict between faith and the best aspects of civilization. It interprets Christ as the great teacher who fulfils the highest aspirations of society, often leading to an accommodation where cultural values and Christian teachings become harmonized. The third expression is *Christ Above Culture* which is a synthesising view, represented (for example) by Thomas Aquinas, maintaining that culture is basically good but incomplete. It posits that while human achievement and reason are valuable, they require God's grace and revelation to reach their ultimate fulfilment. The fourth of Niebuhr's models is *Christ and Culture in Paradox*. This is also known as the "dualist" view (sometimes associated with Martin Luther) which acknowledges a persistent tension between the two realms: Christians must live in both kingdoms simultaneously, obeying secular laws while recognizing the profound corruption of human society, living in a constant state of paradox between sin and grace. Niebuhr's final (and preferred) model was *Christ the Transformer of Culture*. This "conversionist" view shares the dualist's realism about human sin, but maintains an optimistic hope that Christ can redeem and transform every area of human life. Rather than withdrawing or accommodating, Christians are called to work within culture to redirect it toward the glory of God. I wonder which of these models appeals to you? The one which speaks most loudly to me is the final one, and in the life of our parish church I see many examples of ways in which we strive (albeit gently) to transform the culture around us to reflect more faithfully the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## **The next Taizé worship will be...**

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January at 6.30pm, a short meditative service with chants, silence, a reading and prayers – join us if you can!



## **Monthly soup lunches!**

The next soup lunch will be on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January @ 12.30pm - 1.30pm supporting Christian Aid – all welcome!



## **Monthly Litter Pick**

**YOU ARE WARMLY INVITED TO JOIN ST FRANCIS ECO-CHURCH LITTER PICKERS on the first Saturday of each month. The next one will be Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February and then Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 10 - 11.30am, meet at church. All equipment provided, everyone welcome! (children under 18 to be accompanied by an adult).**



## ***Green Tip***

## ***Save money on the road***

If driving long journeys this year, make it a priority to reduce petrol consumption where possible to, not only save money, but help the environment. Check your tyre pressures are correct, remove heavy items from the car like roof racks, accelerate and brake smoothly and fill up with petrol before you reach the motorway where prices are higher.

*Jenny Germain*

*If you have a green tip to share, email [jenny\\_germain@talk21.com](mailto:jenny_germain@talk21.com)*

# Worship & Prayers for The Epiphany

## Opening Rite

*If you're at home you might wish to light a candle, make sure you are sitting comfortably and take a few deep breaths to still yourself.*

The Lord is here  
**His spirit is with us.**

## Prayers of Penitence

The grace of God has dawned upon the world  
through our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who sacrificed himself for us to purify a people as his own.

*cf Titus 2.11-14*

Let us confess our sins.

*After a period of reflection*

God be gracious to us and bless us,  
and make your face shine upon us:  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

May your ways be known on the earth,  
your saving power among the nations:  
Christ, have mercy.  
**Christ, have mercy.**

You, Lord, have made known your salvation,  
and reveal your justice in the sight of the nations:  
Lord, have mercy.  
**Lord, have mercy.**

May almighty God have mercy on *us*,  
forgive *us* our sins, and bring *us* to everlasting life,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

## The Collect

*You might like to keep a few moments of silence*

O God, who by the leading of a star  
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:  
mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith,  
may at last behold your glory face to face;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

## Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord

## Psalm 72:10-15



Lord, ev - 'ry na - tion will come and bow be - fore you.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute;  
the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts. All kings shall  
fall down before him; all nations shall do him service.

For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, the needy and those who have no helper. He shall have pity on the weak and poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

Long may he live; unto him may be given gold from Sheba; may prayer be made for him continually and may they bless him all the day long.

### **Ephesians 3.1-12**

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

### **Gospel Acclamation**



Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”’ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**This is the Gospel of the Lord  
Praise to you O Christ**

### **Reflection**

Matthew, who often quotes or alludes to Isaiah, is echoing the prophet's vision in the way he frames this story, unique to his Gospel. The magi come as the nations did in Isaiah 60 specifically to bring their gifts to Jesus to mark his significance for the whole world and not just Israel. As in Isaiah's vision, so here events in the backwater of Judea have world-changing potential. This story is rooted in the dark politics of our world:

of course, the magi went to pay their respects to Herod – they were in his territory and protocol demanded it. Matthew makes much of the nation's religious leaders telling Herod where the Messiah is to be born. They quote Micah 5:2 with its message of a Davidic king to come, but that is not what the magi had asked – they had travelled to mark the birth of a Judean king. The passage continues in order to show that the child they were led to is of global significance, a figure worthy of their worship – suddenly their gifts felt profoundly appropriate. Not just gold for a king and incense for royal courts but myrrh, generally associated with death (but a costly spice in itself). God intervenes directly at this point, telling them not to make a return visit to Herod and risk the king's anger being unleashed.

### *The links between the readings*

There are connections within the readings, but also with the dark world in which we live – the darkness of winter and short days, the darkness of bad governance and unjust structures, the darkness of people feeling abandoned, needing a message of hope and good news. In bringing these stories together, the compilers of the lectionary highlight that God chooses the marginal and the obscure to bring the life, love and light of his plan for the world – tiny, defeated Israel and a child in a manger.

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### **Prayers**

*Spend a few moments praying for the people you know and love, for the world, for peace and for the relief of refugees everywhere.*

### **On the Feast of The Epiphany**

Creator of the heavens, who led the Magi by a star  
to worship the Christ-child:  
guide and sustain us,  
that we may find our journey's end  
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

## **Praying for the Earth**

## ***Landscape and soil***

We thank you for all that is beautiful in the landscapes that surround us. As the environment forms us, so help us to form an environment that is beneficial to others. We thank you for the soil beneath our feet. As the soil supports and nurtures us, so help us to nourish the soil for the good of all living things. **Amen**

## **From the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer for the Church**

Porvoo Communion: Diocese of London and the Diocese of Nidaros and Trondheim (Church of Norway)

Anglican Communion: Church of the Province of Central Africa  
Primate: The Most Reverend Albert Chama

Diocese of Botswana: St Barnabas Church, Old Naledi (served by the Cathedral of the Holy Cross)

Diocese of Newcastle: Rachel Wood, Archdeacon of Northumberland

## **From our Parish Prayer Cycle this week**

pray for all residents of Lartington Gardens, Lilburn Gardens, Freeman Road, Cloister Garth and The Cloisters

## **For the sick and those being cared for in hospital or at home**

Harry Titley, Jacqueline Pearson, Ida Smart, Lynne Dryden, Liz Clarke, Corinne Harris, Jo Whittam, Veronica Brown, Alan Trotter, Linda Pallister, Alastair Day, Jenny Freeman, John Irving, Maureen Webster, Carol Greener, baby Rajvi, baby Gianna Skye and Daniel Hassan

## **For those in residential care**

Doreen Richardson, Irene Gibson, Deirdré Crowe, Brian Smart, Tony Bartlett, Pat Bell and Pat Hindmarsh

## **For those whose year's minds are this week**

Doris Sidney Wilmot, Eva Charlton, Ethel Lowson, John Duncan Brack, Thomas Oakley, Robert Maddison, Francis Rutherford, Joe Cox, Hannah Walton, Margaret Charlton, Stan Greenwell, Jack Render, Tina Gilroy, Hazel Varty, Ellen Waugh, Ethel May Ridley, Blanche Whitelaw, George Robinson, June Dawson, Isabella Hannant, Gladys Titley, Christina Roach, Colin Brewis, John Bentham and Pat Twentyman

*You might like to end your prayers with The Lord's Prayer*

**Our Father,  
who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

## **The Conclusion**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all evermore. Amen**

**Let us bless the Lord!  
Thanks be to God!**

# FILM SCREENING



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# Parish Directory

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We're open every Wednesday from 2 – 4pm for visitors of all ages, some from the congregation, others from further afield. Whether you're regular or it's your first time you'll be welcomed with friendly conversation and free refreshments!

We are also very grateful to our team of volunteers who run the sessions and would welcome anyone who would like to offer help, whether that be in the form of helping to set up the hall, making and serving drinks, welcoming new people or just being there to engage and interact with people – whatever your strengths might be, they will be highly valued! Contact Helen Swann [placesofwelcomehighheaton@gmail.com](mailto:placesofwelcomehighheaton@gmail.com) or 07487 842 820