

## **WORSHIP @ HOME SUNDAY 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

Good morning, and welcome to worship on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2026. My name is Marilyn Britt and I am Worship Leader at Thatcham Methodist Church in West Berkshire. It's the start of a new year. Christmas appears to be almost over, the decorations are coming down, the lights are going out and families have all gone to their separate homes. All that's left is left-overs – or is it? Sadly for so many the best present of Jesus Christ being born doesn't feature in the celebration. But we know it is the best gift we've ever been given – so our theme this week is **Arise, shine for your light has come** and is

### **Our call to worship from Isaiah 60: 1 – 2**

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

Today is Epiphany – a church festival celebrating the manifestation of Christ to the Wise Men of the East or in the Eastern Church a commemoration of Christ's baptism and the first miracle in Cana. Today we have left the stable, it is about 2 years later .

### **Hymn: Stf 224 As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold.**

1 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 evermore be led to thee.	pure, and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.
2 As with joyful steps they sped, Saviour, to thy lowly bed, there to bend the knee before thee, whom heaven and earth adore, so may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy-seat.	4 Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way ; and, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide.
3 As they offered gifts most rare at thy cradle rude and bare, so may we with holy joy,	5 In the heavenly country bright need they no created light ; thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down ; there for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.

William Chatterton Dix (1837–1898)

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### **A prayer of praise**

Almighty God, praise be to you.

We give you thanks for the blessings you have poured out upon us,  
for the difference you have made to our lives.

For gifts beyond measure: not the gold, frankincense and myrrh  
the wise men brought to Jesus at Epiphany,  
but gifts of forgiveness way beyond what we deserve,  
for love everlasting, light in our darkness and hope in our despair.

Almighty God, praise be to you.

We give thanks for the constancy of your being, eternal,  
unchanging, reliable and secure, which grounds us  
when life around us seems constantly in flux.

Almighty God, praise be to you.

We give thanks for the glimpses we catch of you unexpectedly  
as we go about our daily living.

Glimpses in the light and in the dark.

Glimpses that uphold and sustain us.

Almighty God, praise be to you. **Amen.**

### **A prayer of confession\***

Eternal God, as we start this new year, we confess our failings and our shortcomings. We confess that so often we pack your challenges away with the Christmas cards and wrapping paper. We do not explore your gift enough, we do not always let it change us, but as you have promised so much to us, so we promise to try to be the people you want us to be, and to live the best life we can. **Amen.**

### **Assurance of forgiveness\***

By the birth and death of Christ we are set free, our sins are forgiven. Go in the grace of God. **Amen**

My husband Jeff will read today.

## **Reading: Matthew 2 1 – 12 The Visit of the Magi**

**2** In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi<sup>a</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem, **2** asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east<sup>b</sup> and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah<sup>c</sup> was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

**6** ‘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<sup>d</sup> my people Israel.’ ”

**7** Then Herod secretly called for the magi<sup>e</sup> and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** 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.” **9** When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,<sup>f</sup> until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped,<sup>g</sup> they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** 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. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Today we are spending time thinking about the Magi**

The Magi or the Wise Men – and despite the hymn We Three Kings, we don't know how many there were, but it may have been more. We don't know their names and we only know of three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Gold, a gift for a king, frankincense for a Deity and myrrh to be used in death. They were observant, knowledgeable and wise and when they saw a new star in the sky had to investigate. How did they know that the star represented the Messiah? They may have been eastern astrologers who had studied ancient manuscripts from around the world, or Jews who knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's coming.

They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah. They did not know the way but knew they had to follow the star.

The magi travelled thousands of miles to find the King of the Jews. It must have been hard leaving their families, not knowing what to take and how long they would be away. They may have been from different lands representing the entire world bowing before Jesus. They recognised Jesus as the Messiah when most of God's chosen people in Israel did not.

Perhaps the journey they made was more of a pilgrimage to see the Messiah. We've remembered John the Baptist wandering through the desert, knowing that his cousin Jesus was coming as the light of the world and it was John's job to tell others and to baptise with water. He said someone will come after me and baptise you with the holy spirit. Jesus did journeys – not just as a baby and child – he fled to Egypt to escape Herod. A bit older he went to Jerusalem with his parents and others to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. And then he wandered around Galilee, Capernaum, Jerusalem teaching, sometimes being mistaken as a prophet. And what of our journey with God. Each one of us is on an individual journey – that is what God has planned for each of us. How do we know what to do? We listen to what God has to say to us. Or maybe it is a friend or colleague who says 'you could do this or plan for that. 'It would make such a difference if you did'. If it is in God's plan for us, He will always be with us. And it is that attitude that he will help us sometimes to achieve what seems impossible. It is in example, and using the gifts we have been given that we can make a huge difference. We are 4 days into 2026. There is little silence around the world today:- the clamour of life, international hatred, natural disasters, plane crashes, and perhaps closer to home, in 2025 we've had riots, stabbings, murders, the problems of addictions – of all varieties, poverty, unemployment, a change of priorities at government level, which so often makes listening to the news a horror documentary.

I don't know whether any of you are astronomers. Light pollution can be a major problem. Our daughter Jenni once stayed on her own, in a shepherd's hut in the Brecon Beacons. I asked why. She said it was a place of little light pollution. There are so many stars in the sky but we see very few of them by comparison. I remember a few years ago I was on a ship going to the Azores. I woke up in the night and looked out. The

sky was covered with stars – it was absolutely amazing – I had never seen so many at one time. Genesis 1:14 And God said “let there be lights. in the expanse of the sky to separate the day and the night. He also made the stars. I could only think of God sending his Son as the Light of the World. Let us listen carefully to what God is asking us to do to help share his love by both by words, actions and prayer. This is our journey.

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you have told us to seek and we shall find. Yet that search is not always easy. As we look for meaning in our lives, there is so much that puzzles and perplexes. The more we discover the more we realise how little we have understood. Give us the determination of the wise men to keep on looking, despite all that obscures you, until at last we find the journey rewarded and discover you for ourselves.

**Amen.**

### Hymn: Stf 204 In the bleak mid-winter

1 In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone ; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.	3 Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim throngèd the air — but his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshipped the Belovèd with a kiss.
2 Heaven cannot hold him, nor the earth sustain ; heav'n and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter a stable-place sufficed God, the Lord Almighty, Jesus Christ.	4 What can I give him, poor as I am ? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb ; if I were a wise man I would do my part ; yet what I can I give him — give my heart.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830–1894)

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And so thinking about our journey, the last verse says it all.

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
yet what can I give him, give my heart.

### **Prayers for the world, others and ourselves.**

During Advent and Christmas, we light candles to dispel the darkness, and we have celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, who came in to light the world in its darkness. This light cannot be extinguished but it is a light to share with others who still live in the darkness.

### **Let us pray**

Generous and loving God who sent the light of the world in Jesus, we give you thanks.

We remember and pray for those living in dark places, hiding from bombs, gun fire, and the fear of war.

We pray for those living in the dark places of shop doorways, alley ways, hidden amongst dustbins and rubbish – perhaps where they feel they belong.

We pray for those being hidden from us in lorries, basements, attics and prisons. Some in fear of their lives being groomed and traded as objects. We pray for those who the authorities believe are not safe to live freely amongst us but are in prisons.

We pray for those living in despair. In poverty, hungry and cold and with little hope. We pray for those who are sick, grieving for loved ones, in care homes, hospitals, hospices and other places of care and safety.

We give thanks and pray for those who see the darkness and do what they can to help – Crisis at Christmas, Homeless Shelters, Soup Kitchen, Foodbanks and all the other ways your reflected light is shared amongst those in need.

God of light, we welcome you. We pray that your light shines continually through the darkness of this fragile world. We pray that our response will be the right one, that you will show us how; knowing you will be at our side

with wisdom, strength and courage as we share your love and light.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer** Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be your  
name  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
On earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
As we forgive those who sin  
against us.  
Save us from a time of trial  
And deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are  
yours,  
Now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Hymn: Stf 197 Cradled in a manger meanly laid the Son of Man his head**

1 Cradled in a manger, meanly laid the Son of Man his head ; sleeping his first earthly slumber where the oxen had been fed.  Happy were those shepherds listening to the holy angel's word ; happy they within that stable, worshipping their infant Lord.	3 Evil things are there before thee ; in the heart, where they have fed, wilt thou pitifully enter, Son of Man, and lay thy head ?  Enter, then, O Christ most holy ; make a Christmas in my heart ; make a heaven of my manger : it is heaven where thou art.
2 Happy all who hear the message of his coming from above ; happier still who hail his coming, and with praises greet his love.  Blessèd Saviour, Christ most holy, in a manger thou didst rest ; canst thou stoop again, yet lower, and abide within my breast ?	4 And to those who never listened to the message of thy birth, who have winter, but no Christmas bringing them thy peace on earth, send to these the joyful tidings ; by all people, in each home, be there heard the Christmas anthem : praise to God, the Christ has come !

George Stringer Rowe (1830–1913)

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## **Closing prayer**

Let us arise and shine where there is darkness. We know that the message of Christ's birth was for everyone. But many people don't know and can't imagine the truth about the birth of Jesus Christ and the peace, love, hope and joy He brings so we tell of the good news of Christ, which is for all people. **Amen.**

And the blessing of the Christ-child be upon us all and those we love always. **Amen.**

### **Acknowledgements**

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