



Call to Worship (Poem by Howard Thurman)

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 brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Hymn: StF 224 *William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)*

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.

As with joyful steps they sped
Saviour, to your 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.

As they offered gifts most rare
at thy cradle plain and bare,
so may we with holy joy,

pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.

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.

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.

Opening Prayer

God of New Beginnings, be with us this day as we journey in faith and encounter you anew. Give us courage and hope along our way, as your light glows brightly in our path, leading us to service and discipleship. We come here today to worship and to recommit our lives to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection *Star of Wonder*

Happy New Year! 2022! A time for new beginnings and fresh resolutions. Today is Epiphany Sunday, the time when we remember the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus. According to the Gospel of Matthew, as we heard read, the men found Jesus by following a star across the desert to Bethlehem and they offered symbolic gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gifts were symbolic of the importance of Jesus' birth, the gold representing his royal standing; frankincense his divine birth; and myrrh his mortality.

Susan Andrews pointed out in a commentary that I read: *Is it not odd that wise scientists—who made their living on the merits of reason and research—were wise enough to go beyond reason and follow the intuitive tug of their wondering hearts? In order truly to follow the star, the wise men had to move beyond reason to intuition. They had to move beyond science to faith—trusting the journey even though they did not know where they were going, trusting a wisdom beyond their own to take them where they needed to go. The wisdom of the wise men was a wondering, wandering kind of wisdom that ended up in worship, in their offering homage to the wider and more wonderful Wisdom of God where they discovered God fully alive in the fragile familiarity of flesh.*

We too are heading into the unknown. We don't know what this year will hold for us. Perhaps, like the wise men, we must let go of our reason, and our desire to understand everything right now, and live with the mystical. Perhaps, we just have to wonder and wander and follow the intuition of our hearts and trust the journey and trust a wisdom

beyond our own to take us to where we need to go. As the hymn writer says, *O star of wonder, star of light, guide us to thy perfect light.*

I had a packet of Christmas tree decorations this year with Holy Names for Jesus that I put on the tree that I decorated for Landseer Road Methodist's Christmas Tree Festival. The names were Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, The Word, Only Begotten, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Saviour, Redeemer, Messiah, The Way, The Truth, The Life, The Good Shepherd, The Lamb of God, The Light of the World, The Bread of Life, Jehovah, Almighty, Advocate, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. *What's your favourite Holy Name for Jesus? Which one brings you comfort? Which one challenges you? What names are missing? What image or name of Jesus will you find most helpful to hold onto firmly in this New Year? Write it down, decorate it and hang it up somewhere to remind you.*

Prayers

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shown us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. At the start of this year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; we ask all this through the one who was born at Bethlehem, Jesus our Redeemer, who taught us to pray together: *Our Father ...*

Wesley Covenant Prayer

The beginning of the new year is a great time of year to take stock and to personally recommit our lives to Christ beginning again with a new life and understanding. In the Methodist Church there's a tradition of having a *Covenant Service* at this time of year, and part of the service is the *Wesleyan Covenant Prayer*. It is a beautiful and challenging prayer yielding our entire selves to God and asking God to use us in any way to bring forth God's Kingdom:

*I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.*

*I freely and heartily yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine, and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

Hymn: We Three Kings *John Henry Hopkins (1820-1891)*

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

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

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

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

Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies.

Blessing

Go into the new year trusting in a wisdom beyond our own and go share the light of Christ with others. May the love of God enfold you, the joy of the Prince of Peace well up in you and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit guide you, this Christmastide and forevermore. Amen.