

St Peter's Scottish Episcopal Church, Kirkcaldy



Sunday 3rd January 2021, Epiphany

- Introit Hymn:* All hail the power of Jesus' name
- Welcome:* Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**
- Collect for Purity:* **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.**
- Gloria:* **Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**
- Collect:* Eternal God, who by a star led wise men to the worship of your Son, guide by your light the nations of the earth, that the whole world may know your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**
- Collect SPB:* O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen.**
- First reading:* Isaiah 60. 1-6 (SPB Ephesians 3.1)
- Second reading:* Ephesians 3. 1-12
- Gradual hymn:* As with gladness men of old

Gospel acclamation: **Alleluia! Alleluia! We saw his star as it rose and have come to do the Lord homage. Alleluia!**

Gospel: Matthew 2. 1-12 (SPB St Matthew 2.1)

Homily:

I am sure that we are all familiar with pantomimes – a type of stage play that engages the audience, by encouraging either loud shouts of “Hooray!” for the good guy, or exclamations of “Booo!” for the obvious bad guy. Pantomimes have simple plots and simple characters who seem to need help seeing what is right in front of them. The audience often yells things like, “He’s behind you!” in trying to warn a favourite character of something bad about to happen.

Today’s gospel reading strikes some similarities to a pantomime because the characters seem so one-dimensionally obvious – at least, they do to us as outside observers. We have Herod, the obviously bad character – wise men, who seem like unsuspecting good guys – and right in the middle of them, creating the conflict, a sweet little baby, with a star above the barn where he sleeps. As Herod is speaking to the wise men in this passage, it might feel like watching a pantomime – wanting to yell, “Watch out! He’s behind you!” Or even more simply, “Boooo!”

What makes Herod so bad? What motivates him to be this evil king? Fear. Herod is motivated by a fear which has gripped his heart and is strangling the air from his lungs. He fears that what has been prophesied about this baby will be true – and that his power will be compromised, even by a little child. This fear calls out the very worst in Herod – as it does in us. He becomes obsessed – wanting to entice the wise men to come back and tell him where this baby is.

It is curious that Herod doesn’t go himself – he could have controlled his own results if he went on this journey himself – and yet he doesn’t. Is that motivated by his fear, too? So terrified of this little baby and what he might mean, the threat he might bring to the monarchy and the power of the throne, Herod can’t bring himself to go and visit an infant.

The wise men, for their part, are equally important to this story. They are called in secret by Herod and sent to Bethlehem. These three wise ones follow the star, which would mean they traveled largely in the dark. In the deep blue midnight skies, they walked and walked, following this star because Herod had ordered them to do so. They finally arrived at the stable where Jesus was, and they were “overwhelmed with joy”.

When they enter the stable and see Mary and Jesus, they kneel and offer him their gifts. How long did they stay there, gazing with adoration at the newborn and his mother? Did they bed down in the hay alongside this little family – with ox and cattle to warm them, waking throughout the night by the cries of the infant Jesus?

At some point, the wise ones are given a dream. Is it a dream the three of them share? Or is it just one of them, with the others having to trust the insight? Either way, this dream is like the lightbulb going on. Suddenly, there is an understanding of who Herod really is – and they decide to leave by a different road and go straight back to their own homes.

What allows these three visitors the wisdom to listen to this dream? Herod is motivated by fear – and maybe these three visitors are motivated by love. They have been to visit the infant Jesus, who is love incarnate – and it has transformed their whole lives. They are no longer manipulated by an evil king; they are able to see his motivations clearly and make their own decisions about what they will do.

From this well-known story, perhaps we learn a new thing this morning by looking at the motivations each character holds, by seeing this as a pantomime playing out before us. While it’s easy to see the forces acting on characters outside of us – forces from both their external and internal environment – our own motivations are often not so clear.

There are many parts to our own decision-making, many factors of motivation. Like Herod, we can be motivated by fear: fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of change – these are just some of the major fears we all face daily.

We might also be curious, as the wise ones were. Willing to go on an adventure, even though we don't know exactly what it might entail. Perhaps we have also traveled many miles by night, following a small star in the night sky.

In this story, we are given a gift – we can come with the wise ones to worship Jesus, and those forces of fear and control which have been acting upon our lives are seen for what they are. In a moment of clear vision, we can see the truth and choose to follow Love incarnate. When we make the choice to follow that Love, we are changed. We are transformed. We are overwhelmed by joy and finally, blissfully, free. Amen.

Nicene Creed: We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father. Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father.
With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Intercessions: *Composed and prayed on behalf of the congregation by a member of the Intercessors Group*

We bring to you, our loving God and Father, all that we are today. We come with memories of the last week and our hopes and fears for the week to come.
In the stillness, quieten our hearts and minds and take from us the strain and stress that weigh us down. Give us instead we pray, a sense of your compassionate presence and the beauty of your peace.
Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

We pray to you, Lord, for your Church throughout the world that she may bear faithful witness to your generous love and your saving power.
As we offer you our prayers and worship today we ask that you will bring new richness into our faith making it like the best wine which we can share joyfully with those around us.
We pray especially for the healing ministry within your church and for those who exercise that ministry. May your compassionate love surround us and lead us in our journey of faith into wholeness of body, mind and spirit.
Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Grant us, Lord, to look with your eyes of compassion at the long struggle of mankind, the wars, the hungry millions, the countless refugees, the victims of natural disasters, the cruel and needless deaths, the heartbreak and hopelessness of so many lives.

By our prayers and through our lives may we hasten the coming of the age when all nations shall be at peace and all people shall live free from fear and free from want, when there shall be no more pain or tears and when all your children will live in the security of your will and the assurance of your love.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

We pray for our families, our friends and for the community in which we live. As we share in each other's joys and sorrows may we be united in your love and strengthened by the knowledge that we do not travel through life alone.

May your healing presence be with those whose marriages begun with joy, hope and celebration are now in difficulties or are broken. In the darkness of their confusion, grief and anger may they somehow sense your compassion and strength which surrounds them and their families and friends who hurt with them.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

We pray for all those among us who feel alone, unloved and unlovable. Lord, give us the insight and sensitivity we need to offer the same love and acceptance that Jesus showed to those suffering the pain of loneliness. And as we seek to serve Christ in one another may our communities and relationships be transformed by hope and love so that, in our lives, your will may be done.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Lord, we bring into your compassionate presence all who suffer physical pain of the body, emotional distress of the mind and empty dryness of the spirit. You know the deepest needs of each one of us and we ask that in your love and mercy you will minister to those needs.

And in a time of quiet we name in our hearts those we love who have need of your healing touch.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Into your hands, Lord, we commend the souls of those who have died recently

and we remember too those who died at this time in years gone past.... Doris Pattinson, John Hitchin, John Watson.

Help us to trust in your mercy and love that we may live our lives in the assurance of your promise to grant us, with them, a share in your eternal kingdom.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Lord, may the healing of your compassion, mercy and love remain among us in our worship this morning. In the days ahead may your transforming spirit bring your joy and love into our everyday lives and may we gladly share that joy, love and faith with those around us.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Confession

and Absolution:

God is love and we are his children. There is no room for fear in love.

We love because he loved us first. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Silence

**God our Father, we confess to you
and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and in what we have failed to do.**

We are truly sorry.

Forgive us our sins,

and deliver us from the power of evil.

For the sake of your Son who died for us,

Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(May) God, who is both power and love, forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Peace: We meet in Christ's Name let us share his peace.

Offertory hymn: We three kings of Orient are

Communion Prayer: God of infinite mercy. We thank you for Jesus our Saviour who feeds his people and gives them eternal life. Though we cannot consume the gifts of bread and wine we thank you that we do receive Christ's saving presence, the forgiveness of sins and all other benefits of his passion. Grant that we may continue for ever in the risen and ascended life of our Saviour. Amen.
(*This prayer is said during the online Provincial service*).

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.

Communion hymn: What child is this

Prayer after Communion:

God of all the nations of the earth, guide us with your light. Help us to recognise Christ as he comes to us in this eucharist and in our neighbours. May we welcome him with love, for he is Lord now and for ever. Amen.

Blessing: Christ the Son of God gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Dismissal: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.

Recessional hymn: Bethlehem of noblest cities

7pm Candle Prayer

Matthew 5:14a, 16

Dear Lord, I ask that as this candle brings light, warmth and radiance to a darkened room, I pray that this candle will represent my readiness to be used for Your service as a light of this world, dispelling darkness. Just as You are the light of the world, help me Lord to mirror You and I pray that You will grant blessings upon these candles as a representation of the light of Your grace, Amen.

John 1:5

Dear Lord, we are the salt and light of the earth and if the salt loses its flavor, then how shall it be seasoned? Father, let this light symbolize the 'dispelling' of darkness and sin within the world and that the light of Jesus Christ will shine like never before. Lord let this light shine in the darkness and we pray that the darkness will never overcome it, this we ask, Amen.

Psalms 119:105

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this prayer for candles, which reminds us that Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. So Lord, just as the Word of God, is a lamp and light to us, I pray for these candles that the fire of the flame will purify me from all selfish desires. This is the prayer of my heart, Amen.

Nehemiah 9:12

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Lord, we bless you because You are Holy and sovereign and there is none like You. Lord, just as the pillar of cloud led the children of Israel by day and a pillar of fire by night to light for them the way in which they were to go, let the lighting of these candles direct us in every area of our life. Let this symbol of light radiate strong enough so that we do not go down the wrong path, this we pray in Jesus Name, Amen.

Matthew 25:3, 6

Heavenly Father, we offer these candles of light unto You as a message of our desire to follow You. But Lord, I pray that we will not be like the 5 foolish virgins who took their lamps and took no oil with them. Let these burning candles represent the fire of the flame of God burning in our hearts. Help our light to continue burning, so that one day, we will meet the bridegroom, in line with Your Word, Amen.

John 8:12, Psalm 18:28, Psalm 43:4

Dear Lord, You are the light of the world and whoever follows You will not walk in darkness. So Father, I pray that these burning candles will remind us that it is You Lord that lights our lamps and it is only through You that darkness can be lightened. So as we reflect on this prayer, Lord we ask that You will help us send out our light and truth, so that they may lead us to Your holy hill and to your dwelling, Amen.

1 John 1:7

Oh God, during this prayer for candles, I pray that You will help me to walk in the light because You Lord are in the light. So Lord, let the symbol of the burning flame, reminds us of the purifying of our sins, because the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness; this is the prayer of our heart, Amen.