

**TOGETHER IN CHRIST,
SHARING HOPE**



VISION SUNDAY RESOURCES : EPIPHANY

JANUARY 2024



**THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND**
Diocese of Chester

Introduction

Matthew 2:11 'They ... presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.'

The journey of the magi is recorded only in Matthew's gospel.

At the start of a new calendar year, we are thinking about how the Epiphany themes of our lectionary readings resonate with our own churches, and in our personal discipleship journeys, as we seek to make a difference to the 1.5 million across the Diocese of Chester

As we celebrate Epiphany throughout January, we are inviting churches to use these Vision Sunday Service resources to plan and deliver a Vision Sunday service so that together we can pray together for our Diocesan Vision.

The Vision Sunday kit of parts includes suggested hymns, readings, and prayers.

There is also an all-age activity to explore the themes of the Diocesan vision and a message from Bishop Mark.

The materials produced for Vision Sunday are designed for use at some point during the first three weeks of Epiphany, though they may be used at any time that best suits a local context. The intention of these sermon notes is to highlight some themes that emerge from the readings set for this season and to indicate how they interact with the diocesan vision.

If you have any questions about these resources, or difficulty accessing the digital elements please do not hesitate to contact a member of the team:

Peter Froggatt, Director of Outreach

peter.froggatt@chester.anglican.org



A message from Bishop Mark



[Watch the Video Here](#)

Video Transcript... "Welcome to this Vision Sunday Service. My name is Mark, the Bishop of Chester and it's been such a joy to be listening again to what God is calling us to be and to do in the Diocese. We planned to do these Vision Sundays earlier in the year and they have fallen in this season of Epiphany when the wise men come searching for the Baby Jesus. And there are four things about that story which just resonate so deeply with our Vision.

The first is the truth that Jesus has been born. It's not an idea. It's not a principle. It's not some great plan that might happen one day. Jesus has been born. We have good news. We have the best news that we can share with other people so we should celebrate. The Vision is about sharing the very best news with others.

The second is, when the king says to the wise men, you are to search diligently: you are to give yourself over to finding. There's something really important to us, as we think about reaching the

1.5 million, about recognising that this is sometimes hard work and needs to be done really carefully, because people are lost. People are outside of our circle of relationships. That's why we have this Vision – so search diligently.

The reason they need to search diligently – and this is the third thing – is because Jesus has been born in an out of the way place. And we don't really recognise that because we just associate Bethlehem with where Jesus was born. But at the time it was kind of the back of beyond. People maybe didn't really think it was very important even though it was the city which was associated with David.

Remember that Jesus turns up in unlikely places because he loves every single person. And so, as we celebrate He's born, as we search diligently, we go to those places which might not hold themselves in a very high opinion because Jesus' love transcends our human expectations.

And then the fourth thing I notice about these readings, which is just beautiful, is that it ends in worship. And we know the political background, we know that Herod actually wants to get the little baby King out of the way for his own political ends. We know and we understand that. But when the wise men come, and they discover the baby Jesus, what they do is they fall down, and they worship and they bring their gifts.

Our journey is not about making us a successful organisation or doing something which the newspapers are going to write about or do something for our own ends. This is the for the sake of those who do not yet know the hope of Jesus Christ, because it's the best thing that they can do with their lives. And its in order that we too may offer our worship to the one who has saved us and given us everything.

So welcome to this Vision Sunday. I pray that as you worship, you too will find yourself drawn afresh into this search for Christ, drawn afresh in to worship of the living God. Because Jesus has been born and this is the very best news that we can possibly share. God bless you."

Vision Sunday Readings

January Lectionary readings (Year B)



Sunday 7 January 2024

First reading: Isaiah 60: 1-6

Psalm: Psalm 72: 1-7

Second reading: Ephesians 3: 1-12

Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12

Sunday 21 January 2024

First reading: Jonah 3: 1- 5,10

Psalm: 62: 5-12

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31

Gospel: Mark 1: 14-20

Sunday 14 January 2024

First reading: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10 (11-20)

Psalm: 139: 1-6, 13-18

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

Sunday 28 January 2024

First reading: Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

Psalm: 111

Second reading: 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

Gospel Mark: 1: 21-28

Themes

Revelation

The coming of light is a strong theme in Epiphany, expressed particularly clearly in Isaiah 60. The light comes as the Lord rises upon his people. The magi following the star come to the light as they meet Jesus. The long and erratic journey that the magi make is seen by some as a picture of the way understanding and faith grow. The means by which faith grows are shown in other readings – see the role of Paul as apostle to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3: 8-9), and how other disciples are made ('come and see' says Philip to Nathaniel in John 1: 46).

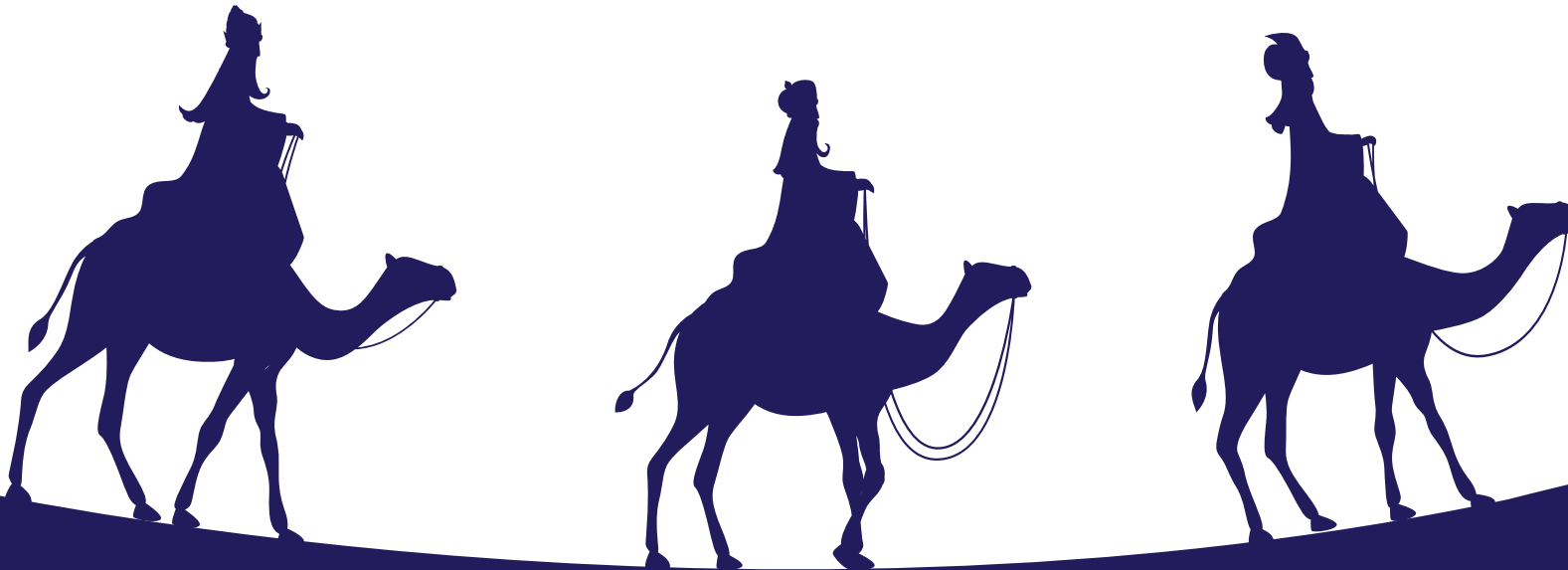
The diocesan vision talks about sharing hope. Hope is a word that connects the coming of Christ with the longings of the people in our communities. The light that has come in Jesus Christ is good, hope-filled news, of God coming to bless people with forgiveness, new life, a community to belong to and confidence for the future.

As Bishop Mark said in his introduction: 'Jesus has been born. It's not an idea. It's not a principle. It's not some great plan that might happen one day. Jesus has been born. We have good news.'

The diocesan vision also talks about growing, braver fuller faith. The gradual revelation of the light of God in Christ continues in us. We might pray for ourselves and others that in this coming year our faith would grow; would be braver; would be fuller, in shaping every part of our lives.

Every tribe, language, people and nation

For Matthew, writing as a Jew for a largely Jewish audience, the coming of the magi is a striking inclusion. Here are people who worshipped other gods coming to worship Jesus, the Christ for the whole world. This world-wide vision continues through Matthew's gospel, right up to the commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:20).



Paul's calling as apostle to the Gentiles shows the great 1st century ethnic divide has been crossed (Ephesians 3: 9 – notice the 'everyone' here): the creation of this world-wide church is designed to show the wisdom of God (verse 10). The worship of heaven will come from every nation and tongue (Revelation 5: 9).

It is in this kind of soil that the Diocesan vision for the 1.5 million finds its roots. The purposes of God are not confined to our churches, or to people like us. As we translate the 1.5 million to a local figure – the number of those in each parish who do not know the love of God in Christ – we think also of those least likely to be already represented in our churches: children and young people, those disconnected from us, or from our communities in general.

The persistent emphasis of these readings, and of the Scriptures in general, is that the gospel is good news for all. Bp Mark talks about this when he speaks about us needing to search diligently and to be willing to go to the out of the way places. We might pray that in this coming year we will take significant steps in making the gospel known, by our lives and in our words, to those we often exclude. Perhaps part of this will be considering how we can build communities of faith that work well for different kinds of people.

Blessing

This is a theme that is particularly strong in Epiphany 3, from Genesis to Revelation. Melchizedek blesses Abraham (the divine priest blessing the father of the faithful?) and in Revelation the church is described as the bride of the lamb, who is wonderfully blessed at the marriage supper. In between is another wedding feast, at Cana, where Jesus shows not just his power but also his loving purpose in salvation, bringing a super-abundance of blessing to everyone who was there. And in the visit of the magi itself, the worship and generosity of the visitors is reflected in the protection that God offers them, blessing them as they travel onwards. Worship, highlighted by Bishop Mark in his introduction, is the right and wonderful response not just of the magi but of everyone who knows the blessing that God brings us.

And this worship is expressed as we in turn bless other people. Our desire is to bless 1.5 million lives, one life at a time. The last phrase reminds us that we each have a part to play in this. This blessing is shown as we engage with our communities, in transformative loving service, given freely and generously. It will be shown as we put the needs of other people and the created order before our own regarding the environment. We are part of God's blessing to others, at home and at a distance, now and into the future, when we care for the creation.



Hymns and songs to celebrate epiphany or that resonate with the diocesan vision themes

All hail King Jesus

Angels from the realms of glory
Angels we have heard on high
As with gladness men of old
Behold the Lamb (Peterson)
Bethlehem, of noblest cities
Be thou my vision
Build my life (Housefires)
Brightest and best of the sons of the morning
Christmas Day (Tomlin)
Come, now is the time to worship
(Doerksen)
Christ is made the sure foundation
Fierce was the storm of wind
Forever reign
Glorious things of thee are spoken
Hail, Thou source of every Blessing
His name is Jesus (Wickham)
Immortal, invisible
In Christ Alone (Stanfill/Passion)
In stature grows the Heavenly Child

In the bleak mid winter

Joyous Light (Tomlin/Crowder)
Let all mortal flesh keep silence
Light of the world/here I am to worship
Light of the world (Daigle)
Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us
Noel (Daigle)
Love came down at Christmas
Not by Thy Mighty Hand
O church, arise (Townend/Getty)
O God who by a star did guide
O morning star, how fair and bright
O thou, who by a star didst guide
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness
One with God the Father
The First Noel
See him lying on a bed of straw
Shine, Jesus shine (Kendrick)
Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

Tell out my soul

The people that in darkness sat
The Virgin Mary had a baby boy
This little light of mine
We are marching in the light of God
(Siya Hamba)
We three kings of Orient are
What child is this?
What star is this, with beams so bright
Ye servants of God, your master
proclaim



Vision Sunday Prayers

Every tribe, language, people and nation

We pray for confidence to share your Word with others and for the opportunity to proclaim it. Forgive our reluctance, our timidity.

We pray for wisdom to know what should be said and the moment in which to say it. Forgive our reticence, our anxiety.

We pray for knowledge of the fullness of your grace and the willingness to live it. Forgive our ignorance, our self-reliance.

Be the centre of all we are
The Light by which we walk
The blessing we bring to others
Through Jesus Christ alone we ask.

Amen

Revelation

Arise, shine, for the Light of the World has come!

Darkness covers the earth and its people,
but the radiance of God's Light
burns away its shadows,
illuminates the furthest corner,
and heralds in the start
of a new dawn,
where hearts no longer fear,
souls might be set free,
and sister shall follow brother,
nation shall follow nation,
and kings and princes bow down in awe
before the one who comes to reign.

Arise, shine, for the Light of the World has come!

Alleluia!

Amen

Blessing

You have gifted the Church through the goodness of your Grace to be your hands and do your work, to be your voice and share your words, to bring healing to a fallen world and broken lives make whole.

You have gifted your people with the blessings of your Spirit, the power to transform lives and make all things new.

Now may our hearts receive, our mouths proclaim, our hands prepare for service, that the love that we have known might overflow our lives and pour into the hearts of others, that all might receive your Grace, your renewing Spirit and your love.

Amen

All-age activity ideas

This is an activity that you could use to remember the themes of our diocesan vision using a hand as a memory tool.

You could use craft materials to draw around your hands or you use pre-cut templates. Write the themes on each of the digits. You could use a piece of dowel or lolly stick to create a handy puppet.

- 1. Thumb: Together in Christ, Sharing Hope (thumbs up, positive)**
- 2. Forefinger: Blessing the 1.5 million, one life at a time (pointing people to Christ)**
- 3. Middle finger: Growing, fuller, braver faith (tallest finger)**
- 4. Ring finger: Transformative loving service (represents love, the weakest finger)**
- 5. Little finger: Engaged locally, working in partnership (small, linking with the other little finger)**





THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Diocese of Chester

Chester Diocesan Board of Finance is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (no. 00007826) and a registered charity (no. 248968)

Church House, 5500 Daresbury Park, Daresbury, Warrington WA4 4GE. Telephone: 01928 718834