

**Sunday January 8<sup>th</sup> 2023**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Rev Alan Hargrave**  
**Epiphany Service**

Charity number 1134226

**Welcome**

A very warm welcome to our worship on this first Sunday of the very short Epiphany Season. My name is Alan Hargrave, married to Annie. We live in Sherwood, near our two daughters & families. I'm actually a retired C of E Minister, but, since retiring in 2016, my wife and I have been members of Sherwood Methodist Church – though I also minister in some of our local Anglican churches as well. So, it's good to share with you today.

You can simply read this service or, if you have a computer, you can click on the links to hear the hymns. (Sorry if you get some ads!).

Well, despite taking the trimmings down on Friday, I think we have time for one more carol, which also reflects today's theme. So, let's sing:

**Hymn** You can sing the words below or follow it here <https://youtu.be/ViVs2bq60ZM>

Angels from the realms of glory  
Wing your flight through all the earth  
Ye who sang creation's story  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo

Shepherds, in the fields abiding  
Watching o'er your flocks by night  
God with man is now residing  
Yonder shines the infant light  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo

Sages, leave your contemplation  
Brighter visions beam afar  
Seek the great desire of nations  
Ye have seen His natal star  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo  
Gloria, In Excelsis Deo

**Let's Pray:**

Lord God, we are here today to honour and worship you.  
We are here to listen to your Word, to bring to you the concerns of our hearts,  
to join together in community, and to offer you our lives anew.  
Lead us into your presence, renew our hearts in worship,  
Open our minds to wisdom, and set our hands to service. Amen

**Confession**

As we come to worship, so we become aware of God's holiness and our own shortcomings. Let's take a moment to think of all that needs God's forgiveness.

Jesus, you are the light of the world,  
in your presence we recognise our wrongdoing and failure.  
Loving God, we are sorry and ask you to forgive us.  
Open our hearts to you and fill them with your glorious light  
that others may see you, shining through our lives. Amen.

Hear again the words of Jesus: 'Neither do I condemn you. Go. Sin no more.'

**Song** As God's forgiven people let's sing the **Peruvian Gloria**. You can find it here <https://youtu.be/oU8wzNrss0c> or simply follow the words below:

Glory to God, Glory to God, Glory to the Father.  
To God be glory forever. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen.

Glory to God, Glory to God, Son of the Father.  
To God be glory forever. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen.

Glory to God, Glory to God, Glory to the Spirit.  
To God be glory forever. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen. Alleluia Amen.

### **Prayer**

Creator of the heavens, who led the wise men by a star to worship the Christ-child:  
guide and sustain us, that we may begin and end our journey in Christ our Lord. Amen

### **Bible reading 1    Isaiah 60:1-6**

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
"Lift up your eyes and look about you. All assemble and come to you.  
Your sons come from afar and your daughters are carried on the hip.  
Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy;  
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.  
Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah.  
And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

**Hymn** That passage from Isaiah reminds us of that prophecy, fulfilled as the wise men came on Camels to offer gold, incense and myrrh to the infant Jesus. So, we sing '**Brightest and Best**'. You can find it here: <https://youtu.be/8Q5A4TctOn0> or follow the words below.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid;  
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining;  
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;  
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,  
Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all!

Say, shall we yield Him, in costly devotion,  
Odours of Edom and offerings divine?  
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,  
Myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would His favour secure;  
Richer by far is the heart's adoration,  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid;  
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

## Bible reading 2 Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

**For the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

## Address

I have just bought tickets for the new David Hockney exhibition: 'Bigger and Closer' - on at the Lightroom, in London, until April. It is what's called an 'immersive experience', with large projections of his art onto the gallery walls. These apparently include paintings he did on his iPad, which take you on a journey of his brushstrokes, from a blank canvas to the finished work.

Some years ago, we went to a different Hockney exhibition, at the Royal Academy of Arts, called '**A Bigger Picture**'. Did you see it? It was a series of very large works, some up to 50ft across and 20ft high, made up of 20 or 30 different canvases, displayed together as a single image. They were landscape paintings of the Yorkshire Wolds. Here is just one of them.



Now, even as a **Yorkshireman**, I have to say that the Yorkshire Wolds are nothing special. They are an area that people generally pass **through**, on their way to somewhere else, usually **Bridlington**. But Hockney's paintings brought the Wolds to life in a dramatic and wonderful way. The paintings were stunning, inspiring, uplifting. As I walked round, I listened to the commentary on my headset, which included an interview with Hockney himself. He was asked: 'Why on earth, at the age of 75, did you decide to start painting landscapes, when landscape painting is considered so tired these days?' You could hear Hockney's voice light up as he replied: 'Oh, it's not nature that's tired. It's just our way of looking at it that's tired.'

It was a wonderful challenge to me: to look at **familiar things** with **fresh eyes**. And it proved a rich vein of blessing for me, over a long period of time. It was, you might say, an '**Epiphany Moment**'. Today we celebrate this short season of **Epiphany**. We generally associate Epiphany with the visit of the **Magi**, the **wise men**, who travel from far away, probably from Persia (present day Iran) to visit the Christ-child with their gifts. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and still today in parts of the Orthodox church, Epiphany was one of the **3 great Christian festivals** – together with Easter and

Pentecost. And the focus of it wasn't just the visit of the Magi - but the revelation of Christ in three very significant moments: -

1. The revelation of Christ to the gentiles, in the form of these pagan astrologers, from the East.
2. The revelation of Christ when Jesus is baptised, by John, in the Jordan, when a voice from heaven calls him God's beloved Son.
3. And the revelation of Christ to his disciples, in his first miracle at a Wedding in Cana, where he changes water into a ridiculously excessive amount of wine, when they were already drunk!

The word Epiphany means: 'a moment of sudden or great revelation. An **Awakening**'. In all these cases, their eyes were opened, in a completely new way, to see something they'd **never grasped** before. A new realisation. Seeing differently, with **fresh** eyes - rather than **tired** eyes. Something where you think: 'O Gosh, I'd never realised that before.' Or: 'Wow! That's just blown my mind!' I wonder what **Epiphany moments you've** had, in the past? Maybe you had an 'Epiphany moment' in 2022? Do they happen to you often? Or are they, as they are for me, **rare** events? I wonder **where** - or **when** - your epiphany moments generally happen? Is there a particular **context** in which they occur? Maybe it's in your **daily devotions**? Maybe there's a particular **place** you go to, or a special **time of year**, when **God** speaks to you? Perhaps it's on **retreat**, or at a **festival**? Maybe it's through **literature**? Or **poetry**? Or **music**? Or **art**? What is it that opens **you** up to see things in **new** ways, with **fresh** eyes? Where and when do your '**Epiphany moments**' happen? Spend a minute or two thinking about that now.

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My most recent Epiphany moment came before Christmas, reading a very short book of speeches by Volodymyr Zelensky, the president of Ukraine. It's called: '**A Message from Ukraine**'. They are pithy, real and deeply spiritual. They engage **not** with abstract, hypothetical issues, but with the nitty-gritty-reality of a country at war, a country that has been invaded, violated, devastated by an enemy. I warmly commend it to you.

But let me ask you **another** question: If and when that sort of experience happens. What do you **do** with it? Is it just a '**blip**' in the midst of your ongoing life? 'Wow! That was great. Now, back to normal.'

Or does it **change** something? Does it provide you, in an ongoing way, with a different perspective? A different way of seeing things? And, does its change what you **do**? How you **live**? Does it change your **priorities**, the things you think of as important? Does it set you off in a different direction? Because that's what happened to the **Wise men**. They saw a strange star in the sky. So, presumably after some discussion, they left their comfortable homes and set off on a thousand-mile journey to - they knew not where!

And, do those Epiphany moments change your relationships? Do they challenge the way you relate to your family, to your neighbours, to people of different religions or nationalities?

It is all too easy for these experiences to be, simply, a '**blip**'. Great when they happen - but with no lasting consequence. But they clearly have lasting consequences for Jesus. Because that experience of God speaking to him and the Spirit descending on him mark the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It marks the moment when he goes to the desert, to wrestle with his demons, before laying down his carpenter's tools and setting off on the costly road of ministry, which will lead him to the cross.

I wonder if there is an **Epiphany moment** *you* turn back to, again and again? I wonder what it is that **feeds** you, that **challenges** you, that **changes** you, that **strengthens** you? I wonder if you see **your heart, your soul**, as a storehouse, a treasure chest of such experiences? A deep **well**, that you can reach down into, and draw on, even in dark days, maybe for months, or even years, after that original, Epiphany moment?

So, in the light of your '**Epiphany moments**' what might God be saying to **you** now? What might God be challenging **you** to **do**? What might God be preparing you for, strengthening you for, in this coming year? What might you draw on, from that deep well of your Epiphany moments, as we enter into the uncharted, choppy, yet opportunity-laden waters of **2023**? And I wonder if **your eyes** are **fresh** enough, **open** enough, to experience **new Epiphany moments** this coming year? For I am sure that God hasn't finished with **any** of us, yet!

If David Hockney, at the age of 85, can **still** see things in a **new way**, can **still** discover **new ways** of doing things, **still** embark on new adventures, then surely, **so can we!** As he himself says: 'It's not nature that's tired. It's just our way of looking at it that's tired.'

And, what is very next verse of our gospel reading, after Jesus experiences that amazing '**high**' of the **Spirit** descending like a **dove** and hears **God's voice** saying: 'This is my **beloved Son**, with whom I am well pleased.'?

The very next verse says: 'Then, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, **to be tested**.'

May God find us, up to the test, in 2023.

**Amen.**

**Hymn** Now let's sing again. As we seek to live out those Epiphany Moments in the way we live, we turn once again to Christ our Lord. You can follow the hymn here <https://youtu.be/oxpPla-BskY> or follow the words below.

All I once held dear, built my life upon, All this world reveres and wars to own  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss, Spent and worthless now, compared to this  
Knowing You, Jesus, Knowing You, There is no greater thing  
You're my all, You're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love You, Lord

Now my heart's desire is to know You more, to be found in You and known as Yours  
To possess by faith what I could not earn, All-surpassing gift of righteousness  
Knowing You, Jesus, Knowing You, There is no greater thing  
You're my all, You're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love You, Lord

Oh, to know the power of Your risen life, And to know You in Your sufferings  
To become like You in Your death, my Lord, So with You to live and never die  
Knowing You, Jesus, Knowing You, There is no greater thing  
You're my all, You're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love You, Lord  
And I love You, Lord, And I love You, Lord.

Knowing You, Jesus, Knowing You, There is no greater thing  
You're my all, You're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love You, Lord.

## Prayers of concern

As Jesus taught us, so we pray:

**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 and forgive us our sins  
As we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

So, let us pray for the coming of Christ's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Where nations fight wars, Christ says: 'Put away your sword'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

Where leaders battle for power, Christ says: 'Blessed are the meek'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

When we throw away good food, Christ says: 'I was hungry and you fed me'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

Where God's creation struggles to cope with our greed, Christ says: 'Behold the lilies of the field'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

Where we put our trust in wealth, Christ says: 'This very night your soul will be required of you'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

In the suffering of many millions, Christ says: 'Blessed are the poor'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

Where our faith is weak and we are sinking, Christ says: 'Take my hand.'

Your Kingdom come      **Your will be done**

And let us pray for the coming of God's Kingdom to the particular situations & people on our hearts. Feel free to mention someone or somewhere by name, in the quietness of your heart.

**All our prayers we offer to you, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Hymn** As we enter into this New Year, let us keep before us, with fresh eyes, our vision of Almighty God, as we sing **Be thou my vision** which you can find here <https://youtu.be/ihJAJA4ibEs> or in the words below.

Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart,  
Nought be all else to me, save that Thy art  
Thou my best thought, in the day and the night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thou presence my light

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word,  
I ever with Thee, and Thou with me Lord  
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son,  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one

Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight,  
Be Thou my armour, and be Thou my might  
Thou my soul shelter, and Thy my high tower,  
Raise Thou me heavenwards, oh power of my power

Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise  
Thou mine inheritance through all of my days  
Thou and Thou only, though first in my heart  
High king of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

Oh, high king of heaven, when battle is done  
Grant heaven's joy to me, bright heaven sun  
Christ of my own heart, whatever befall  
Still be my vision, though ruler of all

### **Blessing and sending out**

At the beginning of this new year:  
May the light of God surround us,  
May the love of Jesus draw us to Himself,  
May the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen us in his service.  
And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us, now and always. **Amen.**

This is the day that the Lord has made  
**We will rejoice and be glad in it**  
We will not offer to God  
**Service which costs us nothing**  
So let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**