

## CALL TO WORSHIP

‘When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.’ (Matthew 2:10-11).

## HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

<https://youtu.be/1IGP68i3JvU>

Hark! The herald angels sing:  
‘Glory to the new-born King!  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!’  
Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies,  
With the angelic host proclaim,  
‘Christ is born in Bethlehem.’  
Hark! the herald angels sing:  
‘Glory to the new-born King!’

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!  
Hail the incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing:  
‘Glory to the new-born King.’

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail, the Sun of righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings,  
Mild, He lays His glory by;  
Born that man no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth;  
Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing:  
‘Glory to the new-born King.’

## OPENING PRAYER

God our source and guide and goal: you have made us in your image and set us in a world full of beauty; you dwell in unapproachable light, yet you have come among us, full of grace and truth. You have revealed yourself in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Help us by your Spirit to worship you in

**spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## CONFESSION

The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3.23). If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins (1 John 1.8-9). Let us confess our sins and seek God’s forgiveness.

**Almighty God, we confess before you our own sin, the sin of the Church and the sin of the world, in which we share. We have not loved you with our whole being; we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. In your mercy, forgive us when we turn to you; release us from the burdens of the past, and remake us in your image and likeness through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5.17). Through him your sins are forgiven. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

## OFFERTORY

**Almighty God, out of the fulness of your gifts we bring before you this bread and wine, our gifts and our lives. Blessed be your holy name forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

## READING: John 1:4-9

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## REFLECTION

**A FRESH START (2) In him was life**

Many years ago when I was studying for my music O level, we studied Mendelssohn’s

Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave). This overture has two main themes running through it right from the opening notes. The first theme is about the beauty of the cave on the isle of Staffa in the Hebrides, written by the composer while there in 1829. It is a theme that is first played by violas, then repeated by cellos and bassoons. It speaks of solitude and aloneness. The second theme depicts the movement of the sea and the rolling waves.

In the same way, John's words here set out two themes that run through his gospel – light and life; two great words on which the gospel is built. 'In him was life, and that life was the light of men' (v4).

Jesus brings you light

One of the things I and so many others like about the Christmas season are all the lights. Christmas lights up a dark season. Of course, now the lights have been taken down, packed up and stored away for another time, and our houses are gloomy once again. As a child I always hated the day when we took down all the lights. It looked so stark and bleak.

Light is a major theme of the Bible. God's first words are 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3). That was a physical light, but not the only light mentioned. Do you remember Jesus' transfiguration, where Jesus face shone with the glory of God (Luke 9:29). But there are other lights too. Twice Jesus calls himself the light of the world (John 8:12 and 9:5). The purpose of the ministry of John the Baptist was to point people to the light of Jesus. He was a witness to the light (v8).

Like John, we are witnesses to the light if we have received the light. The light of Christ wasn't just for the religiously minded. No, John 1:9 says 'The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.' In other words, the light of Christ came to illuminate every person. So, why stay in darkness? Jesus brings you light.

If you are watching this and have not welcomed Jesus the light of the world into your life, do it today. Welcome him by praying something like, 'Jesus, light of the world, come into my life.'

To those of you already living your lives with the light of Christ, where have you seen the light of Christ shining in the past year? Where do you find the light shining brightest? Even though 2020 was a dark year, there was a lot of light, where people helped one another, thought of their neighbours more, showed a lot more compassion and thoughtfulness. This light is still needed.

The light Jesus brings sends darkness packing, and it shows things as they truly are. Remember when Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear their deeds will be exposed' (John 3:19-20). The light of Jesus drives us to God by revealing us to ourselves.

In the creation story, light changed the darkness, and here John tells us that the light shines in the darkness (John 1:5). 2020 was a dark year, and many are glad it's over. We are all looking forward to a more hopeful year ahead, and we could all do with a little more light in 2021.

This year be honest with yourself and with God about the things you are struggling with, the things which are deeds of darkness rather than light. Maybe this week you need to know the restoring life of Jesus, who lights our darkness? That's the first theme – light. Now to the second theme – life.

At the end of the gospel, John writes that the miracles written in his book are written 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31). Jesus said he came that we might have life to the full (John 10:10). He claimed to be able to give life to whomsoever he chooses (John 10:28), and that he is 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). Those to whom Jesus gives life will never perish (John 10:28).

But what does the word 'life' mean? And what does that life look like in a time such as this with yet a further lockdown? Simply put, life means

the opposite of destruction, condemnation and death – it is the life of God. ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16). The Father sent Jesus that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life (John 6:40). The kind of life that Jesus brings is eternal life, which as you know is more than duration, it is a quality of life that we can only experience in relationship with God. Only God is eternal and the life Jesus offers us is the life of God. When we were offered eternal life by Jesus, he was inviting us into the very life of God himself. We enter that life through faith in Christ. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” said John the Baptist (John 3:36).

So what does all that mean for you and me as we enter a new year but with yet another lockdown? It means that life is not dependent on our circumstances but on Christ, and his life cannot be overcome (v5). The life Christ brings reveals the Father heart of God, which is to save. Jesus said, “I did not come to judge the world but to save it” (John 12:47). Maybe this week you need to be reminded of the restoring life of Jesus, who lights our darkness. As Charles Wesley put it in his great carol, Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Life and light to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.’ May you know the healing life and light of Jesus this coming week.

### **CHRIST IS THE WORLD’S LIGHT**

[https://youtu.be/Ne5MOMp6W\\_Y](https://youtu.be/Ne5MOMp6W_Y)

**Christ is the world’s Light,  
Christ and none other;  
Born in our darkness,  
He became our Brother.  
If we have seen him,  
We have seen the Father:  
Glory to God on high!**

**Christ is the world’s Peace,  
Christ and none other;  
No one can serve him  
And despise another.  
Who else unites us,**

**One with God the Father?  
Glory to God on high!**

**Christ is the world’s Life,  
Christ and none other;  
Sold once for silver,  
Murdered here, our brother.  
He who redeemed us,  
Reigns with God the Father:  
Glory to God on high!**

**Give God the glory,  
God and none other;  
Give God the glory,  
Spirit, Son and Father;  
Give God the glory,  
God with us, my brother:  
Glory to God on high!**

### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Lord our God, as we enter into the season of Epiphany, where the Magi were overjoyed, may we know that same joy deep within us. We pray this morning for all those who have lost their joy because of the new lockdown or because they have lost their way in life.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, we pray for the church during this time, that despite our disconnectedness we may know ourselves to be part of your community of joy and loved and prayed for by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, we pray for our family, friends and neighbours, thanking you for them. We pray for our wider community of Bowthorpe, that all within its embrace may know they are remembered in love. Bless them with joy despite the difficulties.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, we pray for the NHS as it begins vaccinating the most vulnerable against covid-19. We thank you for their dedication and endurance.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, we pray for schools as they remain shut after the Christmas break. We pray for staff as they seek to teach remotely, and for students as they learn using technology.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, we pray for those who have lost their joy completely. Help them to realise that you are still present, that you are still a loving God who cares. We pray for the family of Carol Adcock and especially her daughter Sandra and family.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

Lord our God, finally we pray for ourselves, that we may be carriers of the life and light of Jesus in our dark world.

Lord of life and light  
**Shine in our dark world**

All these things we pray in Jesus' name. 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.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are  
yours now and for ever. Amen.**

### LIGHT OF THE WORLD

<https://youtu.be/-MmRGSEG2LM>

**Light of the world,  
You stepped down into darkness,  
Opened my eyes, let me see**

**Beauty that made this heart adore You,  
Hope of a life spent with You.**

*So here I am to worship,  
Here I am to bow down,  
Here I am to say that You're my God;  
And You're altogether lovely,  
Altogether worthy,  
Altogether wonderful to me.*

**King of all days,  
Oh so highly exalted,  
Glorious in heaven above;  
Humbly You came  
To the earth You created,  
All for love's sake became poor.**

*And I'll never know how much it cost  
To see my sin upon that cross.  
(Repeat)*

### THE PEACE

Christ is the Light of the world, it's true Life.

The peace of the Lord be always with you  
**and also with you.**

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

### HOLY COMMUNION

As we gather at this table, we remember that Jesus was born of Mary; he lived our common life on earth; he suffered and died for us; on the third day God raised him from the dead; and he is always present with us through the Holy Spirit. In his presence, and in the company of all the people of God, past, present, and to come, we celebrate the Supper of the Lord. 'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.' (Revelation 3: 20)

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We give thanks to you, O God, that from the earth you cause the grain to come for the making of bread and that you cause the vine to yield fruit.

We praise you for Christ, the bread of life and true vine, whose body was given for us, and whose blood was poured out for us.

By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread which we break may be the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup which we bless may be the communion of the blood of Christ. As we share the sufferings of Christ, so give us grace to know the power of his resurrection, that we may be made one and evermore abide in him, to your praise and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

When Jesus had given thanks he broke the bread and said: 'Take, eat: this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' When Jesus had given thanks, he gave the cup to his disciples and said: 'Drink this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' **Amen.**

The Body of Christ broken for you.  
The Blood of Christ shed for you.

#### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

God of a love stronger than death, you have given us new birth into a living hope through the gift of your Son. God with us, like a mother you have fed us with yourself and strengthen us for the journey ahead. God of truth and power, you take our weakness and our sin and refashion us by your grace.

**Gracious God, may the love which bids us welcome at this table gather all your children into one, in your eternal presence, whole and free at last. Amen.**

#### **AS WITH GLADNESS**

<https://youtu.be/UB8rKNrIpDQ>

**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 God, may we  
evermore be led by Thee.**

**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.**

**As they offered gifts most rare  
at Thy cradle rude 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 forever may we sing  
hallelujahs to our King.**

#### **CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING**

Now, Lord let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and all whom you love, now and always. **Amen.**

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