

Christian Unity

DAY 6

“THEY SAW THE CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, AND THEY KNELT DOWN AND PAID HIM HOMAGE” (MATT.2:11)

Gathered in worship around One Lord

Matthew 28:16-20—When they saw him,
they worshipped him

In the presence of this revelation of God among us, eyes are cast down and knees are bent. When the disciples saw the risen Christ on the mountain in Galilee, they were amazed and troubled. Yet they worshipped him. Encountering God’s presence, we respond thus: gazing, followed by amazement, leading to worship. Do we see? Are we amazed? Are we truly worshipping?

DAY 7

“THEN, OPENING THEIR TREASURE CHESTS, THEY OFFERED HIM GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH” (MATT.2:11)

The gifts of communion

Acts 3:1-10—I have no silver or gold, but what I have
I give you

The wise men opened their treasures, and offered the new-born king their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our historical divisions, our wrong-headed fixation with rules and rituals, and our preoccupation with worldly matters, have broken us apart. So, what gifts have we prepared to offer to the king who comes to illumine our lives and lead us to the grace of unity? The Lord desires our beating and loving hearts: hearts full of love for Him and for our brothers and sisters in Christ from whom we are separated; hearts flowing with acts of mercy; and hearts truly penitent and desiring change.

DAY 8

“THEY LEFT FOR THEIR OWN COUNTRY BY ANOTHER ROAD” (MATT.2:11)

Beyond the familiar routes of separation to God’s new paths

Jeremiah 31:31-34—I will make a new covenant

We do not know what the wise men thought—they who were experts in astronomy and navigation—when they were warned to return by another road. They were called to change direction. We often find ourselves bound by our familiar ways of doing things and of seeing the world. God’s divine providence is always there to show us that there is another way prepared for us. A fresh start is always possible when we are willing and open to the work of the Spirit. Finding the new road demands discernment, humility and courage.

8 days leading to Pentecost

8 days before Pentecost

The traditional period in the southern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is around Pentecost. It is often kept in the days leading up to the feast. This year Pentecost is celebrated on 5 June 2022.

During the Week of Prayer Christians from many different traditions and confessions around the world gather to pray for the unity of the Church.

Material for this year’s Week of Prayer was prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches based in Beirut, Lebanon. They were invited to do it by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

They chose the theme, “We have seen his star in the East and have come to pay homage to him” (Matthew 2:2). More than ever, in these difficult times, we need a light that shines in the darkness and that light, Christians proclaim, has been manifested in Jesus Christ.

In a region of world where human rights are habitually trampled underfoot by unjust political and economic interests, in the face of an unprecedented international health crisis and bearing the human and material consequences of the serious explosion that devastated Beirut on 4 August 2020, the local ecumenical group nevertheless made every effort to present the results of its work by participating in the online meetings, not being able to meet face-to-face.

In Southern Africa, the Christian Unity Commission officially distributes the material from the WCC to the different denominations. The WCC encourages adaptation to local circumstances in the use of the texts and worship services. This leaflet is an adaptation of some prayers and reflections of the material.

It was prepared by the Department for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference. It is suitable for use in a group or in individual prayer, always mindful that when they pray, they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ’s Church.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

PRAYER FOR EVERYDAY

Heavenly Father,

we pray for the visible unity of the Church.

Like the Magi led by the star,

so let us walk together

in humility and patience

with all Christians,

led by the light of Christ.

Strengthen, the bonds of unity

and mutual love among us

and help us to cooperate and witness

to those driven from their homes,

the refugee, the weak,

and those society rejects.

Fix our eyes on Jesus

so we do not lose our way.

Unite us in Him, who is the way, the truth

and the life. Amen.



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2022

MATTHEW 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

DAY 1

“WE OBSERVED HIS STAR IN THE EAST” (MATT.2:2)

Raise us up and draw us to your perfect light

Zechariah 4:1-7—I see a lampstand all of gold

In this fragile and uncertain world, we look for a light, a ray of hope from afar. In the midst of evil, we long for goodness. In the midst of humanity’s darkness the star from the East shone. In it we see a light that penetrates the depths of the darkness that separates us from one another. The desire to overcome the darkness that separates us compels to pray and work for Christian unity.

DAY 2

“WHERE IS THE CHILD WHO HAS BEEN BORN KING OF THE JEWS?” (MATT.2:2)

Humble leadership breaks down walls and builds up with love

Matthew 20:20-28—The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve

Our world craves good leadership and is constantly seeking someone who will fulfil this desire. Only in Christ have we seen the example of a king or leader after God’s heart. His rule is not self-serving and he does not use force. He is one who comes to serve, rather than be served, and his followers are called to do the same. The more faithfully Christians emulate the servant-leadership of Christ the more division in both the world and the Church will be overcome.

DAY 3

“WHEN KING HEROD HEARD THIS HE WAS DISTURBED, AND ALL JERUSALEM WITH HIM” (MATT.2:3)

The presence of Christ, turning the world upside down

Psalms 2:1-10—Why do the nations conspire?

Christ’s coming disturbs the ways of the world, because He rocks the boat of the rich and the powerful who work only for their own interests and neglect the common good. But for those who work for peace and unity, Christ’s coming brings the light of hope. When Christians work together for justice and peace our efforts are more powerful. Through our words and actions, we can bring the light of hope to so many who are still living in the darkness of political unrest, social poverty, and structural discrimination.



DAY 4

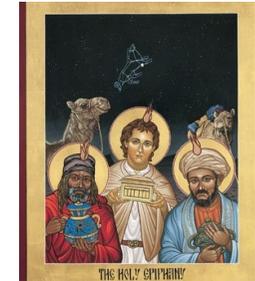
“AND YOU, BETHLEHEM...ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST” (MATT.2:6)

Though small and suffering, we lack nothing

1 Peter 2:21-25—Now you have returned

to the shepherd and guardian of your souls

From the womb of a humble village girl, the Lord, the Son of God, took human flesh in Bethlehem and chose to live his humanity in obscurity and simplicity. And though he is our shepherd, he became the Lamb who carried the sins of the world that we might be healed. The Church, the Bethlehem of today, continues to be the place where the weak, the powerless and the small are welcome because in her each has a place. In the midst of political turmoil, a growing culture of greed, and the abuse of power in this world, Christians, like others in the Middle East, suffer persecution and experience a sense of marginalisation, living in fear of violence and injustice. Yet, they are not afraid because the Shepherd walks with them, gathering them into one fold and making them a sign of his loving presence.



DAY 5

“AHEAD OF THEM WENT THE STAR THAT THEY HAD SEEN AT ITS RISING” (MATT.2:9)

Guided by the one Lord

Exodus 13:17-14:4—The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud

Again and again the scriptures tell us how the Lord God walks with his people and protects them, and watches over them day and night. The path may not always be straight: sometimes we are led to retrace our steps, and at other times to return by a different route. Even in the greatest darkness, God’s light is with us. The way ahead into unity with one another, and so into closer union with Christ, is not always clear. God sends the Holy Spirit whose light enables us to see with the eyes of faith the truth of the divine Child, and the call to unity and the reconciliation of all things in Him.