



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION SUNDAY 4 JANUARY 2026 – Epiphany

COLLECT

O God,
who by the leading of a star
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:
mercifully grant that we,
who know you now by faith,
may at last behold your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 72, verses 1-15

- 1 Give the king your judgements, O God, ♦
and your righteousness to the son of a king.
- 2 Then shall he judge your people righteously ♦
and your poor with justice.
- 3 May the mountains bring forth peace, ♦
and the little hills righteousness for the people.
- 4 May he defend the poor among the people, ♦
deliver the children of the needy and crush the oppressor.
- 5 May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, ♦
from one generation to another.
- 6 May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, ♦
like the showers that water the earth.
- 7 In his time shall righteousness flourish, ♦
and abundance of peace
till the moon shall be no more.
- 8 May his dominion extend from sea to sea ♦
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 9 May his foes kneel before him ♦
and his enemies lick the dust.
- 10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute; ♦
the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring gifts.
- 11 All kings shall fall down before him; ♦
all nations shall do him service.
- 12 For he shall deliver the poor that cry out, ♦
the needy and those who have no helper.
- 13 He shall have pity on the weak and poor; ♦

he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

14 He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, ♦

and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

15 Long may he live;

unto him may be given gold from Sheba; ♦

may prayer be made for him continually

and may they bless him all the day long.

A reading from the first letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 1-12.

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:

The second reading is from Matthew, chapter 2, verses 1-12

and then at the end:

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel. Everywhere except Fitz introduces it with an Acclamation (the blue bit), and then we all use the introduction and ending (the green bit):

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Christ was revealed in flesh, proclaimed among the nations and believed in throughout the world.

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, Chapter 2, verses 1-12.

Glory to you, O Lord

And then at the end:

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

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.

A Reflection from Hannah

The wise men were educated, wealthy people of other belief systems, who knew about Judaism, and whose conviction that a new star in the sky had deep significance led them to bring all that they had- their gifts, their intellect, their wealth, their energy, their lives... and journey very far from home.

Given their status, it's no surprise that they went straight to the seat of established power, in the open, to find out more. But, very soon they discovered that the familiar was strange. The magi ended up being the ones who agreed to inform Herod of a new king being born in his kingdom. This was the moment politics entered the nativity scene- it's also the moment that brings about the terrible consequence of the slaughter of the innocents- not God's will, but the dark and sinister strategy of a man determined to have no threat to his power.

And so the magi going onwards, to Bethlehem, to visit Jesus. It's a collision of two worlds- the familiar has become strange- for Mary and Joseph, who welcome into their dwelling a delegation of the super-rich and super-educated- who arrive with a medley of impractical gifts- three objects drenched in symbolism- gold for a king, frankincense for a god, and myrrh for death. The familiar has become strange for the magi too, who kneel before a baby born clearly into poverty, who will become a refugee, who is dependent on the kindness of others for shelter.

Yet, for both the holy family and the visitors, there is an acceptance- they acknowledge the authenticity of this birth, they recognise that it is entirely appropriate somehow, that Emmanuel- God with Us- is not 'royal born' in the conventional sense, but cuts through the norms and hierarchies of society, and of the religious establishment.

It's an idea that's going to grow- that Jesus is not bound by established religion- that he is not only for the Jewish people, but for all people. Strange and exotic figures from far-flung places can hear the call of God, can follow a star and can find God incarnate nestled underneath it. God's kingdom is indeed a place where the rules we recognise no longer apply, where what seems familiar can become very strange indeed. The journey of the Magi helps us get ready for the magnitude of the mission of Jesus- which grows and grows and ends in Matthew's gospel with Jesus telling his closest followers to 'go and make disciples of all nations.' There are no limits, no boundaries for the love of Jesus- he is for all people, for all time.

All of this is a reminder to expect the unexpected because God's kingdom is topsy-turvy. We do live in times where the familiar has become strange- volatile and worrying times- and yet the visit from the magi is a reminder that God transcends worldly systems and there is truth in unexpected places- we are encouraged to keep our minds open to that.

The reality of Jesus transforms everything. Like the magi did, in the most surprising of places we can find the understated, unfolding truth of God with us- that's what we're invited to. So as this new year begins and we reconnect with our own pilgrimage, the wise men help us to remember the scope of the invitation, that we will meet unlikely companions, that we bring everything we have and are, and that the fulfilment of our longing is the company of Jesus- to kneel in his presence and know we are home.