

EPIPHANY CAROL LITURGY

Epiphany celebrates the appearance of God's glory in the world through the birth of Jesus, our Emmanuel ('God with us'), and the revelation of the incarnation to the Gentiles, and indeed the whole of creation. It has been marked since the 3rd century with a Feast Day on the 6th of January – the Twelfth Night - and celebrated in both East and West in a rich variety of ways. In the Western Church, the emphasis has been on the nativity itself and the acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty over all through the visit of the Magi bringing their gifts.

Tradition gives them names - Melchior, meaning 'King of Light', Caspar, meaning 'White One' and Balthazar, meaning 'Lord of Treasures' – and identifies the gifts they bring as gold, a symbol of royalty to acknowledge Jesus as kingly, frankincense, a recognition of Jesus' divinity, and myrrh as a token of the suffering and sorrow that the child would later undergo.

The revelation of Jesus' true nature is echoed by the words of the prophet Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis, at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (2 February):

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,
just as you promised;
because my eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared for all the nations to see,
a light to enlighten the pagans
and the glory of your people, Israel'. (Lk 2:29-32)

The Greek word epiphany (ἐπιφάνεια) means, literally, 'sudden appearance' and refers above all to the 'manifestation' of a god. It is the moment and the means by which we see that Jesus is so much more than a good human being, a wise teacher and a moral example but in fact God made man, the Word become flesh. It is in this sense that Simeon declares him to be 'salvation' and 'a light to lighten the Gentiles' and that later Jesus calls himself 'the Light of the World', and so the symbolism of light pervades both this season. Christ calls us out of darkness and into light, so that we may recognise the imprints of his divine fashioning in all creation.



SUGGESTED RITE

Welcome and Introduction

Hymn

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King.
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;
with th'angelic hosts proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hark, the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we 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 newborn King!"

Reading John 1:1-14

Reflection

Prayer

We praise you, Gracious God,
for the glad tidings of peace,
the good news of salvation:
your Word became flesh,
and we have seen his glory.

Let the radiance of that glory
enlighten the lives of those who celebrate his birth.
Reveal to all the world
the light no darkness can extinguish,
Our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn

The angel Gabriel, from heaven came,
his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame.
“All hail,” said he, “thou lowly maiden, Mary,
most highly favoured lady.” Gloria!

“For know, a blessed Mother thou shalt be.”
All generations laud and honour thee.
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
most highly favoured lady.” Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head.
“To me be, as it pleaseth God,” she said.
“my soul shall laud and magnify his holy name!”
Most highly favoured lady! Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn;
and Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
“Most highly favoured lady!” Gloria!

Reading Matthew 1:18-23

Reflection

Prayer

Eternal God,
you come near to us in this Christmas season
in the child born of the Virgin Mary.
In the depths of darkness she gave birth to light,
in the depths of silence, she brought forth the Word.

Grant that we, who ponder these things in our hearts,
may recognise in her child
our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

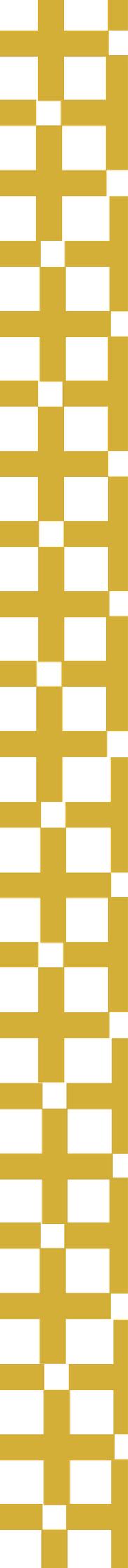
Hymn

See amid the winter’s snow, born for us on earth below,
see, the gentle Lamb appears, promised from eternal years.

*Hail thou ever blessèd morn, hail redemption’s happy dawn,
sing through all Jerusalem: Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

Lo, within a manger lies he who built the starry skies;
he who, throned in heights sublime, sits amid the cherubim. *Refrain*

Say, ye holy shepherds, say, what your joyful news today?
Wherefore have ye left your sheep on the lonely mountain steep? *Refrain*



“As we watched at dead of night, lo, we saw a wondrous light;
angels singing ‘Peace on earth’ told us of the Saviour’s birth.” *Refrain*

Sacred Infant, all divine, what a tender love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss, down to such a world as this. *Refrain*

Virgin mother, Mary blest, by the joys that fill thy breast,
pray for us that we may prove worthy of the Saviour’s love. *Refrain*

Reading Luke 2:8-20

Reflection

Prayer

God of goodness and light
Your tender compassion shines upon us
for in our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
you reveal your gracious gift
of our birth to eternal light.
Let us treasure in our hearts what we have been shown,
that our lives may proclaim your great and gracious mercy.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Hymn

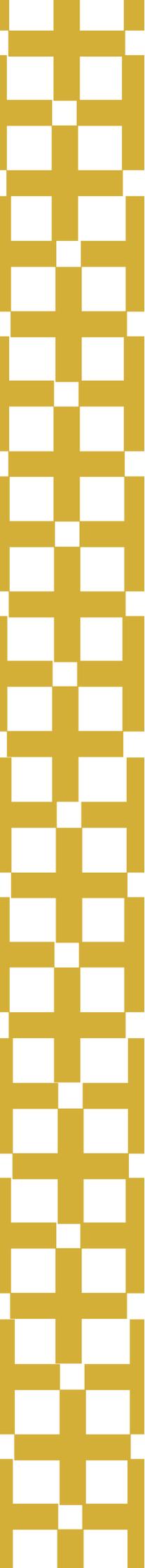
As with gladness, men of old did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most glorious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped to that lowly manger bed,
there to bend the knee before him whom heaven and earth adore,
so may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare at that manger 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 alleluias to our King!



Reading Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection

Prayer

Lord God of the nations,
we have seen the star of your glory
rising in splendour.
The radiance of your incarnate Word
pierces the darkness that covers the earth
and signals the dawn of peace and justice.

Make radiant the lives of your people
with that same brightness,
and beckon all nations
to walk as one in your light.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
in the splendour of eternal light,
God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father

Blessing

Closing hymn

Now let your servant go in peace for praise and blessing here increase;
for in our midst your word is done and you have sent your promised one.

Before the peoples you prepare your way of life which all may share.
Your saving power is now made known; among the nations love is shown.

Child, you are chosen as a sign to test the human heart and mind;
for secrets hidden in the night shall be revealed in piercing light.

Now let us sing our Saviour's praise, and tell God's goodness all our days;
while breath is ours, let praise be heard for God's own faithful, saving word.