

Material for all ages together to supplement the ecumenical worship service

As people arrive, give them each a silver star made of card large enough to hold up during the service.

During the Call to Worship, invite everyone to hold up their stars.

You could start or close with a short gathering prayer in accessible language:

Father God, as we travel with the wise men, lead us to your Son so we may worship.

Amen.

Prayer of Praise and Confession

Have available, or ask people to bring, different torches, battery-operated night lights, etc. Or suggest people use the torches on their mobile phones. At each congregational response: 'We glorify/praise you, O Lord', invite everyone to switch on their torch and wave it as they say the response. If you darken the worship space for this prayer the effect of sudden light will be more effective.

Alternatively, start the prayer with most of the lights off, and at each petition, turn on another light, or have a display of candles, and light another candle, so that gradually the room is filled with light.

You could include this **Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving** in accessible language:

Light a candle.

Response line: **The light has come.**

We thank you, Jesus,

for shining like a dazzling star;

The light has come.

for lighting the world's darkest corners;

The light has come.

for being the place we can run to;

The light has come.

and for speaking in ways we can understand;

The light has come.

Amen.

Psalm 8

This is a psalm of scale: how great is God, and how amazing is the universe, and how tiny are human beings...and yet God considers us, looks for us, sets us to care for the world. In response, we cry out with all creation: how great is your name, O Lord God!

You could add an action response after each of the Congregational verses: How exalted is your name in all the world!

How exalted is *Raise one hand up high.*

your name *Point first two fingers of right hand to forehead and move outwards, dipping into an arc and rotating palm to face outwards as you move.*

in all the world! *Both hands together at eye level, move in opposite directions to draw large circle.*

First Reading

Isaiah 9.2-7

Two suggestions for ways to present the reading.

Begin the reading in as much darkness as you can. Then, after each phrase, someone brings a light and places it near the crib.

These could simply be lit tealights (battery ones, if fire safety is an issue), but it would be more dramatic to use different kinds of lights – e.g. a lantern, a candle, a lamp, a spotlight – placing and directing each one so that when the reading is finished the scene is brightly illuminated.

This paraphrase presentation of the reading is for two readers.

Voice 1: The people stumbling in the dark have seen a great light.

Voice 2: On those living in the land of shadows, the light has dawned.

Voice 1: For God has made the nation greater than they could imagine, and you have increased their joy.

Voice 2: The people rejoice before you as they would rejoice at a bountiful harvest.

Voice 1: Or the way that warriors rejoice when a battle is over, and they have won.

Voice 2: For you have shattered the shackles of oppression.

Voice 1: You have torn the whip out of the tyrant's hand.

Voice 2: Every soldier's boot and every garment soiled with blood will be burned.

Voice 1: All those symbols of sorrow will be fuel for the fire.

Brief pause

Voice 2: For a child is born for us.

Voice 1: A son has been given to us.

Voice 2: The responsibilities of government will rest on his shoulders.

Voice 1: He will be called Amazing Advisor, Almighty God, our Forever Father, Prince of Peace.

Voice 2: The greatness of his government will know no bounds, and his peace will be endless.

Voice 1: He will reign from David's throne and over that long-promised kingdom.

Voice 2: He will establish it on a firm footing, and administer it with justice and righteousness –

Voice 1: From that time on and for ever more.

Brief pause

Voice 2: The Lord Almighty, in his zeal will do all this.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Teach the repeating line, Long, long ago on a dark, dark night, and indicate to everyone when to say the line together. If you have time for preparation, you could use different voices for the narrator, the wise men and Herod.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

some very wise men saw a very bright light.

A big new star in the big dark sky, a big new question,

‘Why, oh why was the star so bright?’

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

the wise men said, ‘What a sight!

How amazing! What is happening?

A brand new star for a brand new king!’ That’s why it burned so bright.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

the wise men said, ‘Let’s follow the light

and find the babe, the newborn king, and give to him the gifts we’ll bring.’

They set their course on the star so bright.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

the wise men found King Herod the Great,

‘Where can we find the newborn king?

We have come to worship him. We saw his star burn so bright.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.’

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

the wise men thought King Herod polite.

‘Find the child and tell me too, so I can worship him just like you.’

But dark, dark plans were born of spite.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

the wise men said, 'Let's follow the light.'

And so they left Jerusalem in search of the babe in Bethlehem.

'We're here!' They said with such delight.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night.

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

they bowed to the boy with a smile so bright,

and gave him gold fit for a king, incense and myrrh for suffering.

But how could they know?

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night?

Long, long ago on a dark, dark night

wise men were warned in a dream so bright.

'Do not go home through Jerusalem!'

So they took another route from Bethlehem, and wondered on their
wanders in the starry night.

Long, long ago in the early light.

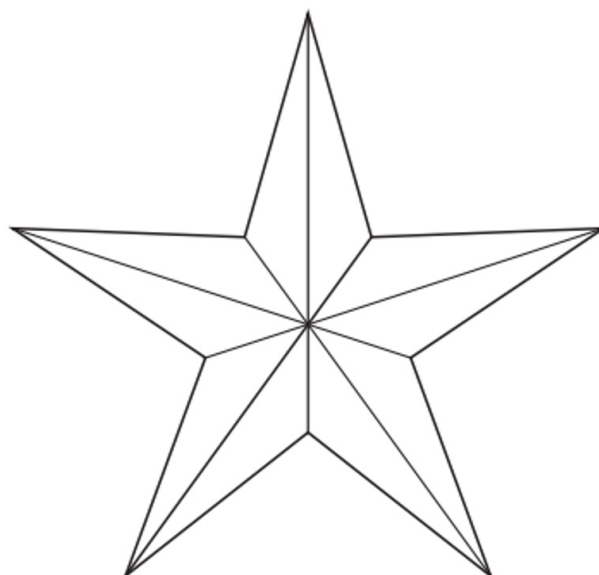
Sermon

An idea for a way for leaders to guide all ages through the reading

Prepare some shapes cut out of sparkly card following the pattern below. The correct number will form a star shape, but begin with the fragments. Ask people to identify the different emotions in today's Gospel story. Collect ten words, writing each on one of the fragments with a dry wipe marker pen. Stick the pieces randomly to a dark backdrop with masking tape or repositionable sticky spray. The story of Jesus is complicated from the start. He comes to turn the world upside down, and those in power fear him. His coming and his message can seem messy and disordered. But when we seek him to worship him, he brings joy and peace. Ask volunteers to create a star shape by repositioning the fragments. The star guides us to Jesus if we wish to follow it. You may like to close by praying for those who feel fear and anxiety at this time, that they might know peace.

Sharing Christ's Light

You could extend the activity by giving out paper stars large enough to write on, and pens or crayons. On the points of one side, invite everyone to write or draw anything for which they need God's help



and guidance. Invite them to write 2022 in the centre on the reverse side of their star.

Additional activity: The Light Still Shines

There have been attempts to extinguish the Church – for example in Soviet Russia. Like Herod’s attempt to murder Jesus, they didn’t succeed. Jesus is a survivor. But he is also vulnerable as a baby. Invite people to consider, in groups if appropriate, whether there is anything today that threatens the things that Jesus stands for. Collect suggestions and with each, blow on an ‘inextinguishable candle’, and say, ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it’ (John 1.5).

Prayers of Intercession

Alternative prayers in accessible language

Response line: **Lord, keep them safe.**

We pray for those facing
long journeys today:
for those who have to walk miles
to collect clean water.

Lord, keep them safe.

For refugees travelling overseas
to find a better life

Lord, keep them safe.

For those setting out
on exciting adventures

Lord, keep them safe.

For those travelling
to see family and friends

Lord, keep them safe.

God our Father revealed his Son to us
as the light of the world.
Let us pray to the Lord,
in the light given to us by his Son,
for the needs of the Church and the world.

We pray that the Church may clearly show
God's abiding love for all people,
and help them draw closer to the person of Christ.
O, Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the peace and well-being in the world,
especially that all leaders
may follow the star which leads to true peace and justice.
O, Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who suffer from lack of direction in their lives;
that Christ's birth
may point out to them the way ahead,
and give them hope in the knowledge that Christ came
as a visible sign of God's love for everyone.
O, Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for this community and for our families;
that we may welcome Christ into our lives and
like the Wise Men,
remain forever pilgrims
who keep our eyes fixed on Christ as our guiding light.
O, Lord, hear our prayer.
Amen.

Gracious God:
to all dreaming of a better world,
give courage;
to all dreaming of an end to violence,
give peace;
to all dreaming of freedom,
give patience;
to all guided by the star of compassion,
give resources;
to all guided by the fear of loss,
give trust;

to all guided by the need to be busy,
give rest;
to all led by the need to be powerful,
give humility;
to all led by the longing to draw closer to you,
give encouragement;
to all led to your table,
give yourself.
To all people, and to all creation, give your love.

Amen.

With very young children

A mini Bible story and three activities if you have very young children present.

Mini Bible story with actions

Following the star
The wise men followed the star.
Twinkle fingers.
When they arrived they were full of joy.
Wave arms.
They gave gifts to Jesus:
Pretend to hand over a gift.
gold, frankincense and myrrh.
Count on fingers.
Repeat so the children can join in.

Journey

- **Play materials:** a nativity set, a storybook of the nativity, three wrapped 'gifts', cut-out card stars, sparkly bits, glue sticks, sticky tac.
- Place the nativity set in one corner of the room. In another corner, read or tell the nativity story, emphasising the wise men. Show the 'gifts' to the children and invite them to take the gifts on a journey to find the baby. Help them to weave their way to the nativity set and lay the gifts beside the crib. Invite them to decorate the stars. These could be displayed above the nativity set or taken home.

Dance

- **Play materials:** joyful recorded music, ribbons, flags, (optional) juice and biscuits.
- Remind the children that the wise men were filled with joy when they found Jesus. Play some music and invite them to dance, and wave flags or ribbons. You could have a 'party' with juice and biscuits.

Prayer

- **You will need:** a 'prayer tree' (a branch fixed in a tub), stars threaded with ribbon for hanging.
- Give each child a star. Introduce the 'prayer tree' and invite the children to pray for someone or something as they hang their star on a branch. Finish with this prayer. Ask the children to repeat each phrase after you:
- Thank you, God, that the wise men followed the star to baby Jesus.
Help us to follow him. Amen.

Suggestions for hymns, songs and tracks suitable for all ages together

You could vary or supplement the suggestions in the Order of Service with these ideas.

Arise and shine, your light has come
A special star, a special star
Every star shall sing a carol
Here with you, God of all
I wonder as I wander out under the sky
Though the fruit tree doesn't blossom
Through you, the blind will see
You bring peace, but not as the world gives
You give life, you are love

Preview songs on YouTube, buy online and download.

- [God's Christmas light](#), Fischy Music on *Even In the Strangest Times*
- [Go home by another way](#) WGRG (*Enemy of Apathy*)
- [We Three Kings \(We're Not Lost\)](#), Rend Collective on *A Jolly Irish Christmas Vol. 2*

Contemporary tracks:

- [Out Of The Dark](#), Mandisa on *Out Of The Dark*
- [Hope Returns](#), Matthew West on *Brand New*
- [Living Hope](#), Phil Wickham on *Living Hope*; [Chords only](#)
- [Waymaker](#), Paul McClure
- [We are](#), Kari Jobe,

These supplementary ideas are all taken from the weekly ROOTS worship and learning resources.

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