

## **Second Sunday after Epiphany – Year A**

### **Second Sunday after Epiphany – 15 January 2023**

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank members of the team who contributed to the material for the second Sunday after Epiphany.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

The readings throughout Epiphany draw out themes of renewal, the universal completeness of God's love embodied in the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, and of welcome, inclusion and acceptance into God's family, through the story of Jesus' baptism.

This year we invited contributors with a pioneering perspective to come together and discuss how they might creatively respond to the lectionary readings, draw together any emerging themes and imagine how they might use them in the different types of settings and contexts in which they worship with others.

Those taking part in the conversations were:

Rev Chris Blackshaw: Pioneer Minister, Ayr Farming Support

Isobel Booth-Clibborn: CofS Children's Development Worker

Michelle Brown: Youth/Children/Families Worker, Portobello & Joppa

Rev Stuart Davidson: Pioneer Minister, Paisley North

Olive Drane: Fellow at St John's College Durham University and Affiliate Associate Professor of Practical Theology

Lesley Hamilton-Messer: Mission Development Manager, Faith Action Programme

Rev David McCarthy: former CofS Fresh Expressions Development Worker and author of *Seeing Afresh: Learning from Fresh Expressions of Church*

Maggie McTernan: Mission Pioneer Team Leader, Presbytery of Irvine and Kilmarnock

Lorraine Orr: Ministries Development Staff, Linlithgow St Michael's

Darren Philip: CofS National Stewardship Consultant

Sue Thomson: Educational Resources Consultant, Scottish Bible Society

Rev Peter Wood: Locum Minister and Pioneer & New Housing Co-ordinator for Lothian Presbytery

The themes that emerged from the conversation for this week's readings drew on the sense that we are part of a much longer timeline, of the longevity of the now but not yet and of sustained effort. There is an invitation to consider what it means to be called into the bigger mission of God.

## [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

This passage highlights God's strong missional initiative and we are invited to join in. It moves from the local to the global. Witnessing to Israel is not enough – we are called to be a light to the world to the ends of the earth, to the whole of creation. God chooses people despite, or because of their background; anyone can be called, this is not just for the elite.

People who have been struggling for a long time, who feel they have been waiting in vain, feeling as though they are stuck, facing uncertainty, with no voice in situations that affect them, are assured that God has known us, named us and loved us from the very beginning. God recognises our effort and exhaustion, but still calls us. God is our strength, equipping us with specialist tools, to be used at the right moment. Our experiences count at the moment when we are called to action.

We also get a sense of perspective here, that the ultimate responsibility does not sit with us (or those on Presbytery planning committees), it is with God; my cause is with the Lord (v49), who is faithful.

Even though we may have been waiting for a long time, and with no help or apparent progress, we must recognise that God is faithful and has something planned. In this passage we get the sense that everything is about to change, there is an overturning of the old order. We are reminded that faith is a two-way relationship; God continues to have faith in us and does not give up on us at the first sign of failure, and we must continue to have faith in God.

### **Psalm 40:1-11**

We hear in this passage that the Psalmist has had a long run of misfortune, not just one bad day. They have come to the end of their reserves, but still continue to praise God's wondrous deeds: deliverance, promises and steadfast love. We are reminded that God does notice us and hears our cry, tenderly leaning down to listen (vv7-8), giving the assurance that I am already known and God's purpose is already written.

The old ways of doing things are no longer required; it is time to change, to get rid of what is getting in the way of us practising the law – not getting rid of the law itself. We have been given a guide – God's law – I will speak to you as you read, your ears will be opened.

We are called to move, beyond a stagnant version of the written law – do we consider Jesus as the dynamic word of God? We are called to keep on speaking about who God is, God's steadfast love, to lift us above the current crisis, fear, anxiety, etc.

In a time of great fear and insecurity, God has set my feet on rock and made my steps secure. This implies movement rather than merely staying on the rock. We are given a sure footing so that we are safe to take the next step.

Verse 10 speaks of things no longer being hidden (cf. Isaiah), and we are encouraged to speak out now.

We are reminded this week that loving God and loving our neighbour are the most important commandments. Burnt offerings and sacrifices do not make any difference if we do not act with love. There is always a wider group to involve, beyond home group, congregation, Presbytery, etc.

Many groups that were previously silenced or oppressed now have platforms and voices. The message of tolerance is not enough, the people in these groups are fully part of this life and this world and we must not only take heed, but work for justice – people who were formed in the shadows are now stepping out into the light.

## [1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

Paul is writing to a church that is in a mess, but he sees them as sanctified in Christ together. He recognises their worthiness, saying you are not valued because of your potential, but because God loves you. We can too often focus on what we might be in the future, and while we undoubtedly have potential, what and who we are *now* is loved and valued and we need to recognise that too.

Paul casually says they are not just 'with', but 'in Christ'. This implies a two-way in-dwelling – Christ in us but also our dwelling in Christ. This is very intimate, the closest of all bonds, but we are also part of something much bigger, a new family, a new way of being, all people in every place.

This is a letter to a community, it is inclusive and we can learn from anyone at any age or stage. There is no special way of being or way of knowing. Every new person enriches and resources the community – one person does not need to have all the skills. We are connected in community, called into fellowship with the global family of God.

Within community others can recognise gifts we may not realise we have. How do we encourage the freedom to cross or expand existing boundaries to worship in different ways?

There is the promise that God is not going to abandon us (v8), God will strengthen us to the end. There is the recognition that things are going to be tough but this will strengthen the quality of our relationship with God. The Corinthians were surrounded by pagan strength, but also had the promise of God's faithfulness.

## [John 1:29-42](#)

The theme of what has been hidden is revealed resurfaces (v31). There is also an invitation to come and see, and testimony about the person of Jesus.

John was preaching to Israel, Jesus came for the whole world. The disciples leave John's ministry to follow a new calling and purpose, starting from small, humble, fragile beginnings (Cephas means a small stone, not a large rock) – a progression of ministry and a global theme.

We see more of the counterintuitive imagery; gentleness of the lamb, dove, water, etc. There are new ways of doing things and of recognising God, and a new section of society is being welcomed/invited that do not have to jump through hoops to join. There is an opportunity to recognise a space for new members in God's economy to feel drawn to. A new language is being used, a new prism through which to see Jesus – how do people need to see Jesus to be able to engage and fully come into relationship with God?

John is in no doubt that Jesus is the chosen one. He recognises that there is a new purpose, a greater power. Things that had been symbolic are now physical, what was hidden is now revealed. The Messiah is here, anointed by God, we see the Spirit descending.

Handing over power does not diminish us. John's story is poignant – he was building up a ministry but recognised that the One who was greater had come and his disciples leave him to follow Jesus. How much sense of loss did John feel, even though he knew it was for the greater good? There is no sense that he asked the disciples to stay, that his ministry was about to be eclipsed. John was not diminished by what he gave up when it was time to do so. How does this relate to us in the Church now? Can we see the Lamb of God in what is happening in new forms of ministry and worship, and be prepared to point others towards them? Both John and Jesus are servants of a greater master, moving towards the ultimate sacrifice.

## **Ideas for worship**

The ideas below can be adapted for use in various formats – as prompts and questions to help you form a sermon or reflection; for conversation starters; or to encourage the sharing of stories and prayers. The practitioners involved in our Epiphany conversations meet in many different contexts which invite new types of worship. We encourage you to think not simply about taking traditional church practices into different places and spaces, but to consider what imaginative responses to the lectionary passages might be inspired by the

place and space in which you choose to gather. Experiment with taking the focus away from the sermon, encourage or ask specific people to share, participate and lead. How can we normalise worship that is not front-led? What new ways can we explore to experience the word when it is not written or read? How might you empower people to pray in different ways – not just with words, but through walking, or engaging with nature, or through creating together.

You might like to consider the following questions as a basis for conversation or reflection within worship:

- As we consider the theme of longevity and the continuing work of God:
  - Describe your church – how quickly or long does it take to get beyond the local to the global?
  - Do we see our church as multicultural/international, etc?
  - Where do we notice Jesus journeying with us / in surprising places?
- Where are we now, what are our challenges and what gifts do we have to meet those challenges?
  - Do we need a paradigm shift?
  - Take a step back and see the faithfulness on both sides (in God and in us)
  - You may wish to shape prayers that give thanks for the gifts in your community, or to seek God's help in the challenges and opportunities
- God is not afraid of change: we may feel we are languishing but God has equipped us to move ahead. In the midst of the ongoing change within our Church:
  - Are we stuck in the miry clay, needing to cry out? Are we hung up on particular issues? What might your prayer be for the local church, for the Church of Scotland?
- Each of the passages describes and invites us into a response, leading to something much bigger than we would imagine. We are invited to follow, to speak out, to be a light to the world... invited, but there is no coercion or threat of the wrath of God, rather a promise of mercy, and of God's strength and resourcing, and of God's faithfulness to us.
  - Where do we recognise God's faithfulness?
  - Where are we noticing the need for mercy?
  - Where are we noticing God working and perhaps an invitation to join with that work?
  - Who are the groups / voices now stepping out from the shadows and finding their platform that you can recognise? How can we engage with / support them?

- Letting go and surrendering everything to God: We spent all our strength (Isaiah), but surrendered to God eventually. John's humility in letting his ministry and disciples be taken over by Jesus.
  - What might we need to let go of?
  - What happens if you let go of power?
  - Are we prepared to point people towards other places or forms of mission beyond what we know?
- God's continuing revelation – from the Psalmist to Paul.
  - Revelations of the past do not preclude new ones as people have need of them. What is the revelation for *this* place and time/generation – both for your local community and as a national Church and society?
  - What are we being invited to consider at this time? What is the big picture? What are we being called into? How might we respond?

### Themes from this week's conversation

During our conversations, the themes noted below began to emerge from the readings.

- The sense that we are part of a much longer timeline
- Longevity – where do we see the continuing work of God, and the Church?  
There is also a sense of the longevity of the now but not yet / of sustained effort. The most profound way to recognise God's purpose is often in the sustained effort.
- A strong doctrine of mission and the expansion from the local to the global view
- God's faithfulness in executing God's plan; patience; waiting for the right time; hiddenness / revelation; now but not yet; God's continuing revelation over time
- God's steadfast love and faithfulness to us, God will not abandon us
- We are loved by and are invited into an intimate relationship with God
- An emphasis on our realisation of the need for action, leading to change – God is not afraid of change and equips us for it
- When we stop relying on our own strength and relinquish our power to God, we are led into much greater things, and become part of God's bigger plan
- What does it mean to be called into the bigger mission of God?



**As you consider the texts we invite you to notice:**

What in the text really piqued your interest or curiosity?

Where did your curiosity lead you?

What questions arose that might help you to shape your material (and could they be helpful for those who are gathering)?

What context is worship happening in, and how might what you use to draw closer to God be shaped imaginatively by particular that context?

**Prayers**

Liz Crumlish, Assistant Curate at St Oswald's Scottish Episcopal Church, Maybole, has written the gathering and sending prayers throughout the Season of Epiphany, along with a reflective prayer to use each week. We have included some points that you might like to consider when writing the prayers to use in your own context.

**Finding the words to pray**

My prayers often emerge as poems. When I sit with the texts, I try to discern how I have seen God at work – in the people around me, in the news stories I have seen or heard. And I reflect on how the texts speak into the work to which God calls, for this moment in time, in the knowledge that we are part of that great communion of saints – who were, who are – and are yet to come.

I also spend some time reflecting on what is the difference we are called to be in this moment in history?

Phrases from the poems then often find a place in the prayers that I offer in worship. I hope they will provide something to help you find words to pray.

**Gathering prayer for the Season of Epiphany**

May Your star pause over this place of worship,  
illuminating Your truth and justice.

Confront us anew with Your call  
to look for power in lowly places  
and to bring our gifts to worship.

You, who are long gone from the stable,  
but present in every place and time –  
God with us.

**Reflective prayer for 15 January**

Come and see –  
the curiosity of a seeker

Come and see –  
the invitation of one smitten

Come and see –  
the catalyst  
that set in motion  
a whole world  
of adventure and intrigue,  
of excitement and trepidation,  
of unanticipated joy  
and heart-wrenching sorrow.

Come and see.

O that we, today,  
were as spontaneous,  
as inviting,  
as inclusive,  
as willing to risk,  
as those first disciples.

To follow a summons  
and recruit others  
to venture out with us.

Come and see...

**Sending prayer for the Season of Epiphany**

May we follow Your light into all the darkness of the world,  
overthrowing the old and tired ways,  
fighting for justice,  
forging paths to peace,  
loving those it's hard to love,  
knowing You go before us and call us to follow.

## Creating the space for prayer

What does your worship gathering need in terms of prayer? Are there traditions or new or emerging practices during worship that act as catalysts for prayer or reflection, or that create spaces for confession and assurance, or praying for others?

Consider how you might create and hold the space for some of these prayers to emerge, as well as how this experience is framed for those present. Are there cues you can take from your context, whether in a particular environment (outdoors, café-style gathering, etc.) that would help people move into a particular moment or practice, or help them create something meaningful in this time together?

What words or actions might help those who are present to express something of their faith/spirituality to create a moment of praise, or provide an opportunity to pray for others and the communities they represent?

Might those gathered be able to share their story and experience, and hear the hopes and concerns of others? How can all of this be shaped into or recognised as prayer for the worshipping community?

## Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

- A suggested [playlist of songs for the Season of Epiphany](#) can be found online
- You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

## Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- While singing in our congregations is still restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?

Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?

How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?

How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?

- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and  
download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

You are free to download, project, print and circulate multiple copies of any of this material for use in worship services, bible studies, parish magazines, etc., but reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted.

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