

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022

Call to Worship

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Brothers and sisters, we are united today with fellow believers throughout the world as we gather to pray for the visible unity of the Church. We do this with worship resources prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches.

Our theme is inspired by the visit of the Magi to the new-born King, as described in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew:

"We observed his star in the East, and have come to pay him homage."

Let us fix our eyes on the star that was seen in the East and allow it to lead us too.

Let us come into God's presence in solidarity with all who are sick, suffering, marginalized, displaced and oppressed, knowing that our darkness can be dispelled by God's light.

As we pray today for the unity of the Church, may we all journey together to meet Jesus the Saviour, the light of the world.

Glory be to you Father Almighty, for you have revealed yourself through your creation and invite all people to gather in your presence.

We have seen the star of Jesus in our lives and have come to worship him just as the Magi did.

We offer him ourselves today and we ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.

Unite us as we come to worship the King, all glorious above. Amen.

Prayer of Praise and Confession

We glorify you, O Lord, creator of heaven and earth, for you have set the lights in the vault of the sky. You separated light from darkness and arranged signs to mark sacred times, and days and years. You studded the firmament with stars.

How majestic are your works, the heavens declare your glory and the skies proclaim the work of your hands! We glorify you, O Lord.

We praise you for you did not abandon us despite our rebellion but sent your Son to brighten our darkness and be our light and our salvation.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. And the light shines in the darkness. We praise you, O Lord.

We worship you, O Lord, for you accompany us in the chaos of our life through the power of your Holy Spirit. **You light up our paths and give us wisdom and faith in a world of untruth and doubt.**

We worship you, O Lord.

We thank you, O Lord, for you send us into the world to witness to this light, in our various churches and diverse cultures, **and to proclaim the Good News to Jesus, the one true King, offering ourselves to him.**

We thank you, O Lord.

May all the peoples bow before you and worship you. We have often preferred darkness, but you have given us light.

Therefore, we come to you confessing our sins and saying:

We confess that we have turned from your ways. We have harmed your good creation through our greed. We have polluted and poisoned the air, earth and waters, destroying habitats and species.

Lord have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

We have acted selfishly towards our brothers and sisters. We have put our own needs and desires above our commitment to justice. We have built walls between us and planted seeds of mistrust.

Lord have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

We have divided people based on ethnicity and culture, discriminating instead of celebrating difference. We have waged war, claiming Jesus for our side.

Lord have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Forgive all these thoughts and deeds, O Lord, as we come before you in repentance.

Lord have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you have sent in the fullness of time to redeem all people, we ask you to have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and transform us into his glorious image so we can shine as a beacon of hope in our troubled world.

Lord have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

Thanks be to God, whom we praise with all our voices.

Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a safe place, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; **What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?**

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Response - Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

First Reading Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. ⁵Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his

government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Response - Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Second Reading - Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you"

Response - Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Gospel Reading - Matthew 2:1-12 - The Magi Visit the Messiah

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." ⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Few thoughts.

Sharing Christ's Light

A star led the Magi to Christ. Today many stars point to the presence of Christ, who has been revealed to us and whose light shines on us. As the Magi followed the star to Bethlehem, so we gather together tonight in God's presence, adding our own stars, uniting our own gifts and prayers for the visible unity of the Church. As we journey towards that goal, may our lives together give a luminous witness that leads others to know Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

With faith and confidence, we come in prayer, before God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: The Magi came from the East to pay homage and offer special gifts from their cultures and countries. We pray today

for all Christian communities around the world in their diversity of worship and tradition: Lord we ask you to preserve these treasures, particularly in areas of the world where the presence and survival of the Church is threatened by violence and oppression. **O, Lord hear our prayer**

The early years of the Lord's life were marked by violence and massacres at the orders of the despot Herod. We pray for children living in places in the world where violence continues and where its results are tangible. Strengthen, O Lord, the bonds of unity and mutual love among our churches and help us to cooperate and witness to your holy Name. Inspire us to work without ceasing in order to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized. Encourage us to stand together in the face of tyranny and oppressive regimes as we seek your Kingdom among us. **O, Lord, hear our prayer**

After the visit of the Magi, the holy family experienced migration through the wilderness and became refugees in the land of Egypt. We pray for all the refugees and uprooted people in this world: Equip us, Lord, to show hospitality to those driven from their homes, and grant us the spirit of welcome to those looking for a safe haven. **O, Lord, hear our prayer**

The birth of Jesus was good news for all, gathering people from different nations and religions in worship of the holy child. We pray for our efforts to seek harmony and dialogue with other religions: Lord, give us humility and patience to walk with others with respect on their journey **O, Lord, hear our prayer**

The Magi returned to their home by a different way. We pray for our churches in this changing world: Lord, help us to find new and creative ways to follow you and to witness to you so that the world may believe. **O, Lord, hear our prayer**

When the Magi saw the holy child, they rejoiced with great joy. Heavenly Father, fix our eyes on him so we do not lose our way. Unite us in the Lord Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and who has taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Sending and Blessing

Go now and live as children of light.

For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

Let us wake from sleep and Christ will shine upon us.

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**