

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2022



Call to Worship

L: In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

L: Brothers and sisters, we are united this day with fellow believers from all the lands of the earth as we gather to pray for the visible unity of the Church. This year, we do so with worship resources prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches. Our texts are inspired by the visit of the Magi to the new-born King, as described in Matthew's Gospel

L: We observed his star in the East, and have come to worship him. Let us fix our eyes on the star that was seen in the East and allow it to lead us too. We come into God's presence with thanksgiving and joy, bringing all the sick, the suffering, the marginalized, the refugees, and the uprooted before him, knowing God can dispel our darkness with his light. As we pray this day for the unity of the Church, may we and our communities also be lights that guide others to Jesus the Savior.

L: Glory be to you Father Almighty, for you have revealed yourself through your creation and invited all people to stand 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.

C: Unite us with one another as we come from all directions of the earth, old and young, men and women to bow down before you and offer you homage, our heavenly king. Amen.

Prayer of Praise and Confession

L: 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, 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! **C:** We glorify you, O Lord.

L: 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.

C: We praise you, O Lord.

L: 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. **C:** We worship you, O Lord.

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

L: 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:

C: We confess before you that we have turned away from your ways and disobeyed your ordinances. We have disfigured your good creation and squandered its resources through our consumerist practices. We have polluted your rivers and seas and poisoned your air and soil and contributed to the extinction of many species. *(Silence)*

C: We have acted selfishly towards our brothers and sisters. We have allowed our own needs and desires to prevail over our commitment to justice. We have built walls between us and planted the seeds of distrust towards the other. *(Silence)*

C: We have separated people based on ethnicity, religion and gender and we have claimed Jesus on our side in any war we waged. Forgive all these thoughts and deeds, O Lord, as we come before you in repentance. *(Silence)*

L: 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. *(Silence)*

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

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

First Reading:

Isaiah 9:2-7

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Psalm 8 (*Responsively*)

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

C: Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

R: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

C: What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

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

C: You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.

R: 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 path of the seas.

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

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 2:1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ ‘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.’”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Sermon

Sharing Christ's Light

L: A star led the Magi to Christ. Today the star points 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, we gather, adding our own stars to the sky, 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

L: With faith and confidence, we come in prayer before God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

R: The Magi came from the East to pay homage and offer special gifts from their cultures and countries. We pray this day for all Christian communities around the world in all of 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 Christians is threatened by violence and oppression. **C:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

R: The early years of our 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 the 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.

C: O Lord, hear our prayer.

R: 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 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.

C: O Lord, hear our prayer.

R: The birth of Jesus was good news for all, gathering people from different nations and religious beliefs 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. **C:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

R: 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. **C:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

R: 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:

**C: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today 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 for ever. Amen.**

Sending and Blessing

L: Go now and live as children of the light.

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

L: Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

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

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

C: Amen. Thanks be to God. Parting