

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading

4th January 2026 at 10:30am

Worship with Communion led by Bridget Gurney Sermon and Communion - Revd Dr Zoltan Biro

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk

Find us on Facebook @Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



“Radiate his hope everywhere”

Call to worship

Father, may we feel your love for us here this morning.

Father, open our hearts and minds to your love.

Jesus, we praise and rejoice in all you did for us through your life and death.

Jesus, open our hearts and minds to acknowledge all you did for us.

Spirit, descend afresh on each of us here this morning.

Spirit, open our hearts and minds to receive you now.

Hymn BPW 315 Joy to the world

Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
let earth receive her King,
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns;
let men their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as sin's curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love.

ISAAC WATTS (1674-1788) based on Psalm 98 and Zechariah 9: 9 / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Family time

BPW 166 In the bleak mid-winter Gifts for the Lord taken during the singing of this hymn

In the bleak mid-winter,
frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron,
water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow,
snow on snow,
in the bleak mid-winter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,
nor earth sustain,
heaven and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign:
in the bleak mid-winter
a stable-place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air
but his mother only,
in her maiden bliss,
worshipped the beloved
with a kiss.

What can I give him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
yet what I can I give him-
give my heart.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830-94) altd. / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Children leave for their different groups

Prayers

Reading 1 Isaiah 60 1-4

Reading 2 Matthew 2 1-12

Hymn BPW 189 As with gladness

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious God, may we
evermore your glory see.

As with joyful steps they sped,
Saviour, to your lowly bed,
there to bend the knee before
one whom heaven and earth adore,

so may we with willing feet
ever seek your mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
at your cradle rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure, and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to you, 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 your glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright
need they no created light;
you its light, its joy, its crown,
you its sun, which goes not down.
There for ever may we sing
Alleluias to our King.

W. C. DIX (1837-98) / based on Matthew 2: 1-11 / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Sermon - *Magi's Hope*

Today's reading about the Magi is one of my favourite Christmas stories, because it has multiple layers packed into it. Over the centuries preachers focused on the Magi's gifts, their determination, their craftiness, their worshipfulness. Some preachers ignored the Magi altogether and focused on Herod's wickedness.

This morning, I would like to highlight how this story is about fulfilment and hope. But before we get to that let me quickly introduce the characters of this story:

While Christian tradition holds that the Magi were kings, a more precise description might be that the Magi belonged to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism, which paid particular attention to the stars. This priestly caste gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science.

The primary prophet for Zoroastrianism is Zoroaster. Who was believed to be miraculously conceived in the womb of a 15-year-old Persian virgin. There are prophecies which predicts that "other virgins would conceive additional divinely appointed prophets as history is unfolding itself". Zoroastrian priests believed that they could foretell these miraculous births by reading the stars.

Taking a closer look at Herod the other main character in our story we realize that he has been on a long career of political climbing to get to the status we find him in the story.

Herod was named governor of Galilee by Antipater II. Antipater's successor Mark Antony appointed Herod as the tetrarch of Judea. During a Parthian siege, Herod was finally named the King of Judea. Now this man, who had spent his whole life climbing to the political height he had achieved, was unlikely to positively receive news that a baby is to be born with a right to Herod's rule. Furthermore, Herod is used to getting rid of people who don't serve his ambition.

He had ten wives, ordered multiple assassinations, including assassinations of some of his own sons, and, changed succession plans multiple times as he decided who would take his throne when he died. So these Wise Ones from the East were scientists and practised other religions, and God used their faith and knowledge to bring them to the Christ. It is ironic, that God used scientists who practiced other religions to let the Jewish elite (King Herod and the Jewish chief priests and scribes) know that their Messiah had been born.

God seems to do whatever it takes to reach out to and embrace all people. God announces the birth of the Messiah to shepherds through angels, to Magi via a star and to the political and religious authorities of God's own people in through visitors from the East.

From a manger, where a child lies wrapped in bits of cloth, God's reach, God's embrace in Christ Jesus, gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

This Jesus, later eats with outcasts and sinners. He touches people who are sick and people who live with disabilities. Jesus even calls the dead back to life. Ultimately, Jesus draws all people to himself as he is lifted up on the cross. In Christ Jesus, no one is beyond God's embrace... Why?

To make them whole... to put them together... to forgive them... to give them a second chance... Jesus is humanity's final hope.

The Magi did not come looking for the Christ through preaching, prayers, communion, a welcome team, or social ministry like B4N, these are the things I hold dear. But our story tells us that the Magi came seeking the Christ after studying the night skies.

I have to confess that I find this challenging, because it's wondrously frightening to realize that God's own work of embracing all people is more of a "mystery" than "formula," because God's ways are always bigger than my understanding. Honestly it would be much safer to spend time embellishing the sermon both spiritually and emotionally and reading meaning into the number and kind of gifts the Magi brought to Bethlehem.

Yet, if I am honest with myself, these days I sense God reaching out to embrace others and me in new and different ways.

The alternative, of course, is to join Herod in not seeing God's ever-expanding embrace, or feeling threatened by it, and instead giving way to just plain fear: "When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:3). Herod jealously reached out himself, just far enough to violently protect his place and preserve his power.

We too can feel threatened when gifted people show up in church outside of our reach and control. We may even reach out as Herod did, just far enough to slaughter someone's experiences of God's grace for the sake of preserving our own power, practices, and perspectives.

The good news of Christmas is that God still meets people where they are. God still uses unexpected signs, unfamiliar paths, and surprising messengers to draw the world toward Christ. The star still shines, not to protect our certainties, but to lead us beyond them.

This Christmas, may we choose the hope of the Magi over the fear of Herod. May we loosen our grip on anxiety and control and instead fall on our knees in wonder and trust. And as we do, may we discover

again that in Jesus, born in a manger, lifted on a cross, risen for the world, God's embrace is wide enough for all, and strong enough to hold us, now and forever. Amen.

MP 66 Broken for me

Chorus

Broken for me
Broken for you
The Body of Jesus
Broken for you

Verse 1

He offered His Body
He poured out His Soul
Jesus was broken
That we might be whole

Verse 2

Come to My table
And with Me dine
Eat of My bread
And drink of My wine

Verse 3

This is My Body
Given for you
Eat it rememb'ring
I died for you

Verse 4

This is My Blood
I shed for you
For your forgiveness
Making you new
Colin and Janet Lunt

New Year's Communion - Invitation to the Meal

Friends, the year may be new,
but the story is old and worth retelling:
Christ gave his life that we might live our own
knowing we are loved, forgiven, and freed.

So come to this communion meal
with the joy of children
sitting down to a good breakfast.

Know that you are welcomed and wanted here,
just the way you are.

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving + The Lord's Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

God, you take delight in beginnings.
You were there before creation,
marking out plans for earth and sea and sky.
You were there in Eden,
shaping humanity in your image.

And you were there in a stable,
as the word made flesh
a crying infant who would change the world.

In Jesus you began again,
to teach and heal us,
guide and warn us,
welcome and teach us
this time right up close.

And even on the cross,
when the sky darkened and the earth shook,
and it felt like everything was at an end
you were planning a new day.

So, on Easter morning the world began again
with death defeated,
and love having won the day.

O Lord our God, we remember the old story
and live in hope of new beginnings still.
Spirit, pour yourself out in this place,
and in all places that need a touch of renewal.
Make this ordinary bread and juice
the sign for us of Christ's amazing grace.
Make of our ordinary lives
the sign for others of Christ's amazing grace.

And so we join together in the words Christ taught us, saying:

**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.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

The Words of Institution

On the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup

Closing Prayer

Holy Lord, you have fed us: teach us to feed others.

You have forgiven us: teach us to forgive.

You have welcomed us: teach us to welcome others.

You have given us your life: teach us to share it with others.

Begin a good work in us this day. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

As we gathered here today entering in a new calendar year, I would like to invite you to pray for each other.

Prayer of Intercession: Think of someone who once knew Christ, who made a commitment and worshipped with joy, but who is now far from God. Ask that the call to discipleship may be heard again.

Think of someone who is overwhelmed by their burden of responsibility. Someone who struggles to cope with the demands of work or home or those who rely upon them for help and support.

Ask that as disciples they may receive strength to care.

Think of someone who fills you with hope, someone whose service, kindness and caring concern bring you joy. Someone whose compassion, understanding and loving smile are a source of encouragement and peace.

Ask that they may be a blessing to others and their lives may bring glory to Christ.

Think of someone who is afraid of the future. Whose memories are filled with pain and who finds it hard to cope with today.

Ask that following Christ will bring them a peace, hope and joy they have never known before.

Think of someone who is uncertain what is that God is wanting them to do with their lives. Or who feels they have little to offer.

Think of someone whose life overflows with gifts and graces from God.

Ask that the call of Christ may lead them to rely on Him for all things.

Think of someone who is faithful to Christ, someone who has known, loved and served God for many years. Whose service has largely been hidden from others, someone who has remained in the background and has never received the encouragement they should.

Ask that they may be assured of their value to God and their place in his kingdom.

Think of yourself. And all that is happening in your life at this time. Think of your hopes and fears, your dreams and your doubts, your "if onlys" and your "might have beens".

Think of all you would like Christ to do in and through your life.

Ask that He will fill you with his Holy Spirit and confirm his Lordship over your life!

We bring all our prayers in Christ's name. **Amen.**

Hymn BPW 190 Brightest and best

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness, and lend us your aid;

star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on his cradle the dew-drops are shining;
low lies his head with the beasts of the stall;
angels adore him, in slumber reclining,
maker and monarch, and Saviour of all.

Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
fragrance of Edom, and offerings divine;
gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation;
vainly with gifts would his favour secure;
richer by far is the heart's adoration;
dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
dawn on our darkness, and lend us your aid;
star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

REGINALD HEBER (1783-1826) / based on Matthew 2: 1-11 / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Blessing

As we go out of this Church, may God the Father, Son and Spirit keep us , hold us and lead through the coming week. Amen.

Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.**

Connect groups meeting for coffee after the service

Events next week:

Tuesday 6 th	8 pm	Zoom Prayer
Wednesday 7 th	10.30	Renew Wellbeing
	12.15	Bible Study
	2.00	iCaf 1
Thursday 8 th	10.30	Bible Study
	10.30	Toddlers
Friday 9 th	5.00	Table Tennis Club
	7.30	Worship 24/7 Reading

Sunday 11 th	10.30	Worship Introduction to Spiritual Habits (Matthew 6:1-21)
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Church meeting follows the service

QR Code for Financial Offering:

