

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022

"We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

They came to worship! To worship is the most authentic thing that we can do; it is to recognise who God is and also who we are; our lives and everything we have and are, are a gift of God. Without him we have nothing, and we are nothing. To truly recognise this would surely be the greatest freedom.

Worship properly understood is not just some outward action separate from the rest of my life; I worship now and then I go off and live my life completely separately. If I worship, then worship is my life. God is given his rightful place day and daily, all the time.

In this understanding worship can never just be a personal thing, between me and God, just the two of us.

The Magi stand for the whole world in all its awesome and sometimes scary variety; They said 'we saw his star in the East and we have come to worship'; the call of God that is written in each of our hearts is a universal call. There is a hunger in every human heart for God, a hunger for goodness, truth, and beauty. St Augustine captured it so well with his; 'you have made us for yourself o Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'

God has placed this desire for himself in every human heart; so very many do not recognise and certainly couldn't name it for what it is. It means that God wants his whole human family to be united with him in that proper reality where God is God; he is truly Lord of all, and his Kingdom has come. That's what the Wise Men were seeking. They came from outside the culture, outside the tribe; they stood for the whole world seeking and needing God.

Our unity with one another and with God is what God longs for; it is what we long for in the depths of our being though we rarely recognise it, and only in a faltering way.

We Christians are called to be a sign to the world of the unity that God wants. The unity of Christians as a sign for a broken and divided world is an apostolic imperative.

In the story the Magi came following the light and it led them ultimately to Bethlehem and they worshipped. But on their way, they passed through Jerusalem, and they met Herod who was frightened – and all Jerusalem with him; and we know the disastrous consequences of Herod's - and all Jerusalem's - being frightened. There was no end to the lengths Herod would go to, not excluding infanticide, to defy the plans of God. In the heart of each one of us we can recognise both the Wise Men and the longing to follow the star that leads to worship and community and, on the other hand Herod and the crippling fear that distorts our deepest desires and keeps us apart and at odds.

The wonderfully hopeful thing about the story of the Wise Men is that they followed the star wherever it led them; they met Herod, face to face, heard Herod's sweet talk and his

blandishments; they went on and found the Christ child and they worshipped him, they shared their gifts with him and they went home by another way.

So what can we as Christians, who are both united and divided learn from the story this Church Unity Week of 2022. We can see that among us and in each of our hearts there is the presence of the Magi; we know that we share common longing to find Christ child and worship him. Just as the Magi brought gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. We as Christians have different gifts, different insights into the life and work of Jesus. We are invited by the story of the three strangers from the East, so very different from us, to look on our differences as a source of gift rather than alienation.

We are invited to confront the Herod in our own hearts, the one who fears the other and who will even defy God, and then to proceed by another way.

But above all, let us renew our shared commitment to looking out for signs of the star that calls us to authentic worship, to allowing God to be God because in doing that we will open our hearts to each other and we as Christians will be a sign for a united world.