



Epiphany Carol Service



Sunday, 18th January 2026, 4pm

Welcome to Coventry Cathedral

Epiphany marks a moment of unveiling. It tells of God made known, not only to those closest to the story, but to the world beyond its edges. In the visit of the wise ones, the light of Christ reaches across borders and cultures, drawing seekers from afar and surprising those who thought they knew where holiness would be found.

This service invites us to listen for that revealing again. In the readings we hear of light breaking into darkness, of wisdom learning how to kneel, of journeys that lead not to power but to presence. In the music, ancient and new, the story is allowed to breathe, giving voice to wonder, longing, and praise.

At the heart of Epiphany is this truth: God does not remain hidden. God is revealed to the world. As we sing and listen, may we glimpse that light for ourselves, and be gently changed by it.

Before the service Adam Heron, Cathedral Organ Scholar will play *Les Mages* from *La Nativité du Seigneur* by Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992).

The artwork on the cover is a mural entitled “Adoration of the Magi” in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception at Conception Abbey in Conception, Missouri, USA. Painted by Benedictine monks in the late 1800s.

The congregation gathers at the Chapel of Unity steps (those not able to stand take their seats in the front of the Nave).

At 3.55pm, the choir and ministers, led by the Great Cross, process to the nativity scene at the Chapel of Unity. The service begins with the Choir singing the introit, during which the ministers kneel at the crib.

Introit

O magnum mysterium admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum jacentem in praesepio. O beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Jesum Christum. Alleluia!

O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Jesus Christ the Lord. Alleluia!

*Words from Matins of Christmas Day, Roman Breviary
Music by Morten Lauridsen (1943-)*

Welcome

Rising from before the crib, the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry, gives a welcome.

Opening Prayers

Beloved, we gather in this holy place,
under the light that once drew the wise from distant lands.

Tonight we follow that star again,
not to power or certainty,
but to the child in whom God is revealed to the world.

We come to see, and to worship.

In scripture, poetry and song,
in silence and in splendour,
the mystery of Epiphany is opened before us.
Strangers become seekers,
the learned learn how to kneel,
and gifts are laid down in love.

Let the light of Christ lead us.

Let us listen for the voice of God,
and open our hearts to the journey ahead.

Bidding Prayer

God of starlight and searching hearts,
you draw the wise from afar
and meet them in a place of humility.
As we gather under your light,
still our restlessness,
quiet our certainties,
and make room within us for wonder.
Reveal your Son to us anew
through word and music,
through silence and praise,
that we may recognise his light
and follow where it leads.
Through Jesus Christ,
light of the world.

Amen.

The procession moves from crib to chancel. The congregation follow to their seats in front of Nave.

Hymn

Of the Father's heart begotten
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore.

O that birth for ever blessed,
when the Virgin full of grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bare the Saviour of our race,
and the babe, the world's Redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore.

**This is he whom seers and sages
sang of old with one accord;
whom the writings of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines, the long-expected:
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore.**

**Christ, to thee, with God the Father,
and, O Holy ghost, to thee,
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
and unwearied praises be,
honour, glory, and dominion,
and eternal victory,
evermore and evermore.**

Words by Prudentius (348 - 413)

translated by J.M. Neale (1818-1866), H.W. Baker (1821-1877) and others

Tune CP 65 *Divinum Mysterium* melody from *Piae Cantiones* (1582)

harmonised by editors of *New English Hymnal* (1986)

We SIT.

Poem

Read by Canon Margaret Sedgwick, Lay Reader Emeritus.

On Epiphany day,
we are still the people walking.
We are still people in the dark,
and the darkness looms large around us,
beset as we are by fear,
anxiety,
brutality,
violence,
loss -
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.
We are - we could be - people of your light.
So we pray for the light of your glorious presence
as we wait for your appearing;
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace

as we exhaust our coping capacity;
we pray for your gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust
in your good rule.

That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact
your rule through the demands of this day.

We submit our day to you and to your rule, with deep joy and high
hope.

Walter Brueggeman (1933-2025)

We remain SEATED.

Anthem

“When he is King we will give him the Kings’ gifts,
myrrh for its sweetness, and gold for a crown,
beautiful robes,” said the young girl to Joseph,
fair with her first-born on Bethlehem Down.

Bethlehem Down is full of the starlight –
winds for the spices, and stars for the gold,
Mary for sleep, and for lullaby music
songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

When he is King they will clothe him in grave-sheets,
myrrh for embalming, and wood for a crown,
he that lies now in the white arms of Mary,
sleeping so lightly on Bethlehem Down.

Here he has peace and a short while for dreaming,
close-huddled oxen to keep him from cold,
Mary for love, and for lullaby music
songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

Words by Bruce Blunt (1899-1957)
Music by Peter Warlock (1894-1930)

We remain SEATED.

First Reading

Read by Adam Heron, Cathedral Organ Scholar.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

¹Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ²For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. ⁵Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Isaiah 60: 1-6

We STAND.

Hymn

**Bethlehem, a noble city,
has been blessed beyond compare,
for the gracious God of heaven
once became incarnate there.**

**Fairer than the sun at morning
was the star that told his birth,
to the world its God announcing,
seen in human form on earth.**

**From the east came men of wisdom
bringing treasures prized of old,
tributes to a greater wisdom,
gifts of incense, myrrh, and gold.**

**Sacred gifts of mystic meaning:
incense shows that God has come,
gold proclaims him king of nations,
myrrh foretells his saving tomb.**

**Holy Jesus, in your brightness
to the gentile world displayed,
with the Father and the Spirit
endless praise to you be paid.**

Words by Prudentius (348 - 413)

translated by Edward Caswall (1814-1878)

Tune CP 85 Stuttgart

adapted from a melody in C.F. Witt's Harmonia Sacra Gotha (1715)

We SIT.

Second Reading

Read by Nick Porter, representing the Sunday Evensong congregation.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.

Thus says the Lord:

¹⁵ A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;

she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord:

Keep your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for there is a reward for your work,
says the Lord:

they shall come back from the land of the enemy;

¹⁷ there is hope for your future,
says the Lord:

your children shall come back to their own country.

Jeremiah 31:15-17

We remain SEATED.

The Coventry Carol

Lully, lulla, by, by, lully, lullay,
Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, by, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do for to preserve this day?
This poor youngling for whom we sing By, by, lully, lullay.
Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, by, by, lully, lullay.

Herod the king, in his raging, charged he hath this day
His men of might in his own sight all young children to slay.
Lully, lulla, lullay, thou little tiny child, by, by, lully, lullay.

That woe is me, poor Child, for Thee, and ever morn and day.
For thy parting nor say nor sing, By, by, lully, lullay.
Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child, by, by, lully, lullay.

*Words 15th century, from the pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors, Coventry
Music by Philip Stopford (b. 1977)*

We remain SEATED.

Third Reading

Read by the Fraser Watts, represents the Cathedral Eucharist Congregation.

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew.

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘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.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They 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 and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.' ⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2: 1-12

We remain SEATED.

Anthem

A babe is born all of a may,
to bring salvation unto us.
To him we sing both night and day.
Veni Creator Spiritus.

At Bethlehem, that blessed place,
the child of bliss now born he was;
and him to serve God give us grace,
O lux beata Trinitas.

There came three kings out of the East,
to worship the King that is so free,
with gold and myrrh and frankincense,
A solis ortus cardine.

The angels came down with one cry,
a fair song that night sung they
in worship of that child:
Gloria tibi Domine.

A babe is born all of a may,
to bring salvation unto us.
To him we sing both night and day.
Veni Creator spiritus Noel!

*Words 15th century, anonymous
Music by William Mathias (1934-1992)*

We SIT.

Fourth Reading

Read by the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry.

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, ¹² and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1: 1-14

Reflection

Given by the Reverend Su McClellan, Cathedral Associate Minister

Prayers

Following the brief reflection, we remain SEATED or KNEEL for the prayers.

Let us pray for the Church,
that it may keep its eyes on the star
and learn again how to travel lightly.
May it speak of Christ not with noise or fear,
but with the quiet authority of love made visible.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the world,
for nations restless and divided,
for lands marked by violence, oppression and grief.
In this city shaped by both loss and hope,
we ask for the courage of reconciliation
and the wisdom that makes for peace.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who seek truth,
for those moving through a wilderness of voices,
half-truths, and hurried judgements.
Grant us a wisdom that knows how to kneel,
that waits, listens, and learns
before it speaks or acts.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the poor and the displaced,
for those with no safe road to travel
and no place prepared for them.
May we recognise Christ in every stranger,
and offer not what is easy,
but what is needed.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Let us pray for ourselves,
that we may notice the holy where we least expect it,
and have the courage, like the wise,
to leave changed,
returning by another road.
Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

And now, in the stillness of this place,
we offer to God the prayers of our own hearts,
held in the light that never goes out.

Pause for silent prayer

God of light and long journeys,
gather what we have prayed
and what we have only dared to hope.
As the star once rested over a place of welcome,
rest your Spirit among us now.
Send us out attentive, unafraid, and changed,
carrying light into ordinary days,
and wisdom into all we meet.
Through Christ, revealed to the world,
Amen.

We STAND.

Hymn

**Unto us is born a Son,
King of quires supernal:
See on earth his life begun,
Of Lords the Lord eternal,
of lords the Lord eternal.**

**Christ, from heav'n descending low,
Comes on earth a stranger;
Ox and ass their owner know,
Becradled in the manger,
becradled in the manger.**

**This did Herod sore affray,
And grievously bewilder,
So he gave the word to slay,
And slew the little childer,
and slew the little childer.**

**Of his love and mercy mild
This the Christmas story;
And O that Mary's gentle child
Might lead us up to glory,
might lead us up to glory!**

**O and A, and A and O,
Cum Cantibus in choro,
Let out merry organ go,
Benedicamus Domino,
*benedicamus Domino.***

Words translated by G. R. Woodward (1848-1934)

Tune from *Piae Cantiones*, 1582
arranged by David Willcocks (1919-2015)

The Blessing

Given by the Very Reverend John Witcombe, from the High Altar.

May the light that led the wise ones
lead you also on your way.
May Christ, revealed to the nations,
be known to you in stranger and neighbour,
in question and in hope.
May you have courage to follow where the star rests,
and grace to offer the gifts you carry.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Remain standing as the ministers and choir process to the Lady Chapel. The Congregation to follow the procession.

**The first Nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields as they lay, keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.**

**Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
born is the King of Israel.**

**They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east beyond them far,
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.**

**And by the light of that same star
three wise men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.**

**This star drew nigh to the northwest,
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay
right over the place where Jesus lay.**

**Then entered in those wise men three
full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there in his presence
their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.**

**Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord;
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,
and with his blood mankind hath bought.**

Words and music from an English traditional carol

*The Choir, in the sanctuary, and the congregation, gathered around the
statue of Our Lady, remain standing as the choir sings an anthem.*

Marian Antiphon

Bogoródítse Dyévo, ráduisya,
Blagodátnaya Mariye, Gospód s
tobóyu. Blagoslovýéna ty v
zhenákh, i blagoslovýén plod
chryéva tvoyevó, jáko Spásá
rodilá yesí dush náshikh.

*Mother of God, rejoice. Blessed
Mary, God is with Thee; Blessed art
Thou among women and blessed is
the fruit of your womb because you
bore the Saviour of our souls.*

Music by Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

*The Choir is led to Saint Michael's Gallery and the ministers peel off to the
West Screen.*

Organ Voluntary

*Please do stay for the Organ Voluntary, played by Liam Condon, Assistant
Director of Music.*

Prelude and Fugue in C BWV547 by J.S. Bach (1685-1750).