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**The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity  
Sunday January 23, 2022 - 4:00 p.m.**

*Online*

*Thank you for observing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with us today; it is wonderful to be together! Please keep your microphone muted for most of the service, unless you are a designated Reader reading section of the liturgy, a lesson, or a prayer. At the lines marked "A," everyone is invited to unmute momentarily to offer the response. Please then please re-mute yourself as the liturgy continues.*

*Music today is taken from The Hymnal 1982, and used by permission.*

**"R": Reader/Responder (on behalf of everyone)**  
**"A": All (unmuted)**

## Welcome

**R1:** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be among us.

"We saw the star in the east, and came to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)

Dear friends in Christ: we are gathered in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and in another year of the pandemic. In this extraordinary way we are able through technology, we are together to pray and give thanks for signs of visible unity among the followers of Jesus Christ, and offer our prayers for reconciliation everywhere in our world.

**R2:** Among Christians, divisions of one kind or another have existed practically since our beginnings. While some divisions testify to rich diversity and differences of Christians, and witness to the infinite richness of the Gospel, we recognize that other divisions among us are contrary to the vision of the Gospel; we believe the power of prayer can help us overcome these kinds of division. Together with Christians the world over, we pray today for the healing of both the household of God in Christ and the world in which we live.

**R1:** As they have for more than one hundred years, our worship resources today come through the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute, which each year invites churches from a different part of the world to prepare resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year's resources were prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches, and inspired by Biblical texts of the visit of the Magi to the new-born Savior, as described in the Gospel of Matthew.

**R3:** "We observed his star in the East, and have come to worship him," Matthew reports the Magi saying. Let us also fix our eyes on that star they saw in the East, and allow it to lead us as well. Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving and hope, bringing the sick, the suffering, the marginalized, the oppressed, the refugees, and the uprooted before God, knowing that God has come to light our way no less than that of those who came to Bethlehem. As we pray for the unity of the Church, may we and our communities become lights guiding others to Jesus the Savior.

**R4:** Glory be to you holy and living God, 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 even as Magi did. We offer ourselves today, and ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit among us. Unite us as we gather, O God, bowing before you and offering you our homage.

**A:** Amen.

### Hymn

*What star is this, with beams so bright*

*Unison or harmony*

1 What star is this, with beams so bright,  
2 True spake the prophet from afar;  
3 The bright; with them  
4 O Je - sus, while the star of grace im - pels us  
5 To God the Fa - ther, heaven - ly Light, to Christ, re -

1 than the noon - day light? It shines to her - ald  
 2 rise of Ja - cob's star; and east - ern sa - ges  
 3 shines a clear - er light, and leads them on with  
 4 on to seek thy face, let not our sloth - ful  
 5 vealed in earth - ly night, to God the Ho - ly

1 forth the King, and Gen - tiles to his crib to bring.  
 2 with a - maze up - on the won - drous to - ken gaze.  
 3 power be - nign to seek the Giv - er of the sign.  
 4 hearts re - fuse the guid - ance of thy light to use.  
 5 Ghost we raise our e - qual and un - ceas - ing praise.

**R1:** We glorify you, O God, creator of heaven and earth, for you have set the lights in the vault of the sky. You separated the light and arranged signs to mark sacred times, days, and years. You studded the firmament with stars, and gave responsibility for the creation below to humanity. How majestic are your works, O God, the heavens declare your glory and the skies proclaim all your works!

**A:** We glorify you, O Lord.

**R2:** We praise you, O God, for you did not abandon us despite our rebellion, but sent your Christ to be our light and salvation. In Jesus was life, and that life was the light of all humanity, your shining Word incarnate.

**A:** We praise you, O Lord.

**R3:** We worship you, for you accompany us in every chaos of life through the power of your Holy Spirit. You light our paths, giving us wisdom and faith in a world of doubt and untruth.

**A:** We worship you, O Lord.

**R4:** We thank you, for you send us into the world to reflect the light of Christ, in our various churches, communities, and cultures; you call us to witness to Jesus, who calls us to follow the Way.

**A:** We thank you, O Lord.

**R1:** Yet, because we have often followed our own ways rather than yours, O God, we come today also confessing our sins. We confess that we have turned away from you and neglected your ordinances. We have disfigured your creation and squandered its resources. We have polluted your rivers and seas, poisoned your air and soil, and contributed to the extinction of many species. (*Silence*)

**R2:** We have acted selfishly towards others, and allowed our own needs and desires to prevail over our commitments to justice and peace. We have built walls between us, and planted seeds of distrust towards others. (*Silence*)

**R3:** We have separated people based on ethnicity, religion, race, or gender, and we have claimed Jesus on our side in wars we have waged. Forgive all these thoughts and deeds, O God, as we come repentant before you. (*Silence*)

**R4:** Gracious God, in the fullness of time you sent your Christ to lead all people to their freedom in you. We ask you to have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and transform us into Christ's glorious image, that we might shine as beacons of hope in our troubled world. (*Silence*)

**R1:** May Almighty God hear our prayers, have mercy, and forgives us our sins.

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

## **First Reading:** *Isaiah 9:2-7*

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup>You 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. <sup>4</sup>For 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. <sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>For 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. <sup>7</sup>His 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**

**R1:** O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

**R2:** Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

**R1:** When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

**R3:** What is humanity that you are mindful of us, mortals that you care for us?

**R1:** Yet you have made us but a little lower than yourself, and crowned us with glory and honor.

**R4:** You have given us dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under our feet.

**R1:** All sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the path of the seas.

**R2:** O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

## **Second Reading:** *Ephesians 5:8-14*

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

## **Third Reading:** *Matthew 2:1-12*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>‘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.’” <sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

## *Reflections on the 2022 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*

The Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah, The Middle East Council of Churches

**R1:** A star led the Magi to Christ. Today this 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 under this star today, 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 and Thanksgiving**

**R1:** With faith and confidence, we come in prayer before God, who calls us as one.

**R2:** 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 tradition, worship, and practice. 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.

**A:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

**R3:** The early years of our Lord's life were marked by violence and massacres ordered by Herod and other despots. We pray for children living in places where violence continues: Strengthen, O Lord, bonds of unity and mutual love among our churches; help us cooperate and witness to your holy Name in ways that call out the sin, bring relief and justice for the victims, and change the ways of the perpetrators. Inspire us to work without ceasing to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized. Encourage us to stand together in the face of tyranny, as we seek your just reign among us.

**A:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

**R4:** After the visit of the Magi, the holy family migrated 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.

**A:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

**R2:** The birth of Jesus was good news for all, gathering people from different nations and religious beliefs in praise 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 for their journeys.

**A:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

**R3:** 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 so that the others may know the love you have for them.

**A:** O Lord, hear our prayer.

**R4:** When the Magi saw the holy child, they rejoiced with great joy. Fix our eyes also on this child, that we not lose our way. Receive our thanks, O God, for all the ways we are able to cooperate and serve your mission in Vermont and our wider world. Hold us as one in our Lord Christ Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, and in whom we place all our hope.

## Hymn

*In Christ there is no East or West*

*Unison or harmony*

1 In Christ there is no East or West,  
2 Join hands,  
3 In Christ now dis-ci-ples meet both East of East and West, faith, West, in what in

him no South or North,  
e'er your race may be!  
him meet South and North,  
all Christ - ly souls are

ship of his love through - out the whole wide earth.  
as his child is sure - ly kin to me.  
one in him, through - out the whole wide earth.

## Sending

R1: Go now and live as children of the light.

R2: For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

R3: Take no part in the works of evil and sin.

R4: Let us wake to the Christ who has come to shine upon us.

R1: Let peace with justice be to all, and faith and hope manifest the undying love of our one, Lord Jesus Christ.

A: Amen. Thanks be to God.

## Hymn

*Go forth for God*

1 Go forth for God; go \_\_\_\_\_ to the world in peace;  
2 Go forth for God; go \_\_\_\_\_ to the world in love;  
3 Go forth for God; go \_\_\_\_\_ to the world in strength;  
4 Go forth for God; go \_\_\_\_\_ to the world in joy,

be of good cour - age, armed with heaven - ly grace,  
strength - en the faint, give cour - age to the weak;  
hold fast the good, be ur - gent for the right;  
to serve God's peo - ple ev - ery day and hour,

in God's good Spi - rit dai - ly to in - crease,  
help the af - flict - ed; rich - ly from a - bove  
ren - der to no one e - vil; Christ at length  
and ser - ving Christ, our ev - ery gift em - ploy,

till in his king - dom we \_\_\_\_\_ be - hold his face.  
his love sup - plies the grace \_\_\_\_\_ and power we seek.  
shall o - ver - come all dark - ness with his light.  
re - joic - ing in the Ho - ly Spi - rit's power.

*Thank you for participating in today's observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Portions of today's liturgy were taken from resources provided by the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute.*

*For over a hundred years the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute has sponsored the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the octave between the Feast of the Confession of St. Peter (January 18) and the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul (January 25). Each year Graymoor invites the church in a different part of the world to offer a theme for the celebration, along with Scriptural and liturgical resources that, to its mind, raise up concerns of Christians in that part of the world in the context of the Gospel's vision that all the followers of Jesus Christ be one.*

*As members of the Vermont Ecumenical Council we are blessed to be part of this worldwide observance. We are inspired by the historic Lund Principle, from the World Council of Churches' 1952 Faith and Order Conference held in Lund, Sweden. The Lund Principle affirms that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.*

*To this end, the Vermont Ecumenical Council seeks to act as a "network of Christian cooperation," connecting Christians across our state for the work of God through Christ. We invite you to visit our website at [www.vecncc.org](http://www.vecncc.org), and consider joining the VEC if you are not already a member. For more information on the history and background of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, please visit the website of the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute at [www.geii.org](http://www.geii.org).*

*Special thanks to Michael Hartigan, Parish Musician of Trinity Episcopal Church, Shelburne, for coordinating today's music and technology, and to Ryan Boisvert, Communications Officer for the Vermont Ecumenical Council, for additional support.*