

Christian Unity Week 2022

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Theme

The theme for the 2022 Week of Prayer is ‘We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him’ (Mt 2:2), taken from the account of the visit of the magi to pay homage to the infant king (Mt 2:1-12). It is a call to unity, of those from the North and the South, from the East and from the West, old and young, men and women.

Introduction

The story of the Magi visiting the Holy Family in Bethlehem is one very familiar to us. The Magi have sometimes been seen as a symbol of the world’s diversity – different religions and cultures – that comes to pay homage to the Christ-child. The story might therefore represent the unity of all created that God desires.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2022 has been prepared by the churches of the Middle East, the history of which was, and still is, characterised by conflict and strife, tainted with blood and darkened by injustice and oppression. The Christians of the Middle East offer these resources conscious that the world shares many of the travails and much of the difficulties that it experiences, and yearns for a light to lead the way to the Saviour who is the light that overcomes darkness.

It was in the Middle East that the Word of God took root and bore fruit: thirty and sixty and one hundredfold. And it was from this East that the apostles set out to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Middle East has given thousands of Christian witnesses and thousands of Christian martyrs. And yet now, the very existence of the small Christian community is threatened as many are driven to seek a more secure and prosperous life elsewhere. Like the light which is the child Jesus, the light of Middle Eastern Christianity is increasingly threatened in these difficult times.

Jerusalem is a powerful symbol for Christians because it is “The City of Peace”, where all humanity was saved and redeemed. But today peace is missing from the city. Even prayer in Jerusalem has become subject to political and military measures. Various parties stake their claim to it and disregard others. Jerusalem was the city of kings, indeed the city that Jesus will enter triumphantly, acclaimed as king (Lk 19:28-44). Naturally the Magi expected to find the new-born king revealed by the star in this royal city. However, the narrative tells us that, rather than being blessed by the birth of the Saviour king, the whole of Jerusalem was in tumult, much as it is today. Today, more than ever, the Middle East needs a heavenly light to accompany the people.

In this context Christians are called to seek the new-born king, the king of gentleness, peace and love. But where is the star that leads the way to him? It is the mission of the Church to be the star that lights the way to Christ who is the light of the world. By word and through action the Christian people are called to light the way so that Christ might be revealed, once again, to the nations.

Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to the human being, especially the poorest, the weakest and those marginalised. It requires from the churches transparency and accountability in dealing with the world, and with each other. This means churches need to cooperate to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displaced, to relieve the burdened, and to build a just and honest society. This is a call for churches to work together so that young people can build a good future according to God’s heart, a future in which all human beings can experience life, peace, justice, and love.

Additional Resources:

Reflections for each day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity are available on the link below:

<https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/WPCU-2022-English-A5-1.pdf.pagespeed.ce.c2Ohs37kOX.pdf>

HISTORY OF WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

In 1908, there was the Octave of Christian Unity which focused on praying for church unity, and whose dates were put forward by Father Paul Wattson. He chose the week beginning on the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter on January 18, concluding with the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on 25 January. Pope Pius X approved the concept and Benedict XV encouraged its observance throughout the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1920s, the Protestants proposed their own octave of prayer for unity to occur during the week of Pentecost every year.

In 1941, the Faith and Order Conference changed the date to the one observed by Catholics, from January 18 to 25. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity gained worldwide recognition among churches when the World Council of Churches was established in 1948. By 1958, the French Catholic group Unité Chrétienne, and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, began co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.

In 1968, churches used notes and texts created through the joint effort of the Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity officially for the first time. The cooperation between these two organizations has grown since, resulting in joint publications in the same format, said to represent the entire Catholic Church.

Synodal messages for Parish Bulletins

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission The Synodal Pathway in the Diocese of Meath

All the baptised in the Diocese of Meath are invited to participate in the synodal process during Lent 2022. Opportunities to engage in the process locally will be announced in February.

Enlightened by the Word of God and united in prayer, we will be able to discern the processes to seek God's will and pursue the pathways to which God calls us – towards deeper communion, fuller participation, and greater openness to fulfilling our mission in the world. (Vademecum 1.2)

To learn more about synodality

see www.synod.ie or www.dioceseofmeath.ie/news/universal-synod/

Other quotations

'Synod' ... indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14,6), and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called 'followers of the Way'. (Vademecum 1.2)

Synodality denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. (Vademecum 1.2)

All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world. (Vademecum 1.2)

The objective of the current Synod is to listen, as the entire People of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. We do so by listening together to the Word of God in Scripture

and the living Tradition of the Church, and then by listening to one another, and especially to those at the margins, discerning the signs of the times. (Vademecum 1.3)

By convoking this Synod, Pope Francis is inviting all the baptised to participate in this Synodal Process that begins at the diocesan level. Dioceses are called to keep in mind that the main subjects of this synodal experience are all the baptised. Special care should be taken to involve those persons who may risk being excluded: women, the handicapped, refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc. (Vademecum 2.1)

The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment. ... We listen to each other, to our faith tradition, and to the signs of the times in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. Pope Francis characterizes the two interrelated goals of this process of listening: "to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us." (Vademecum 2.2)

Prayer for the Synod

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.

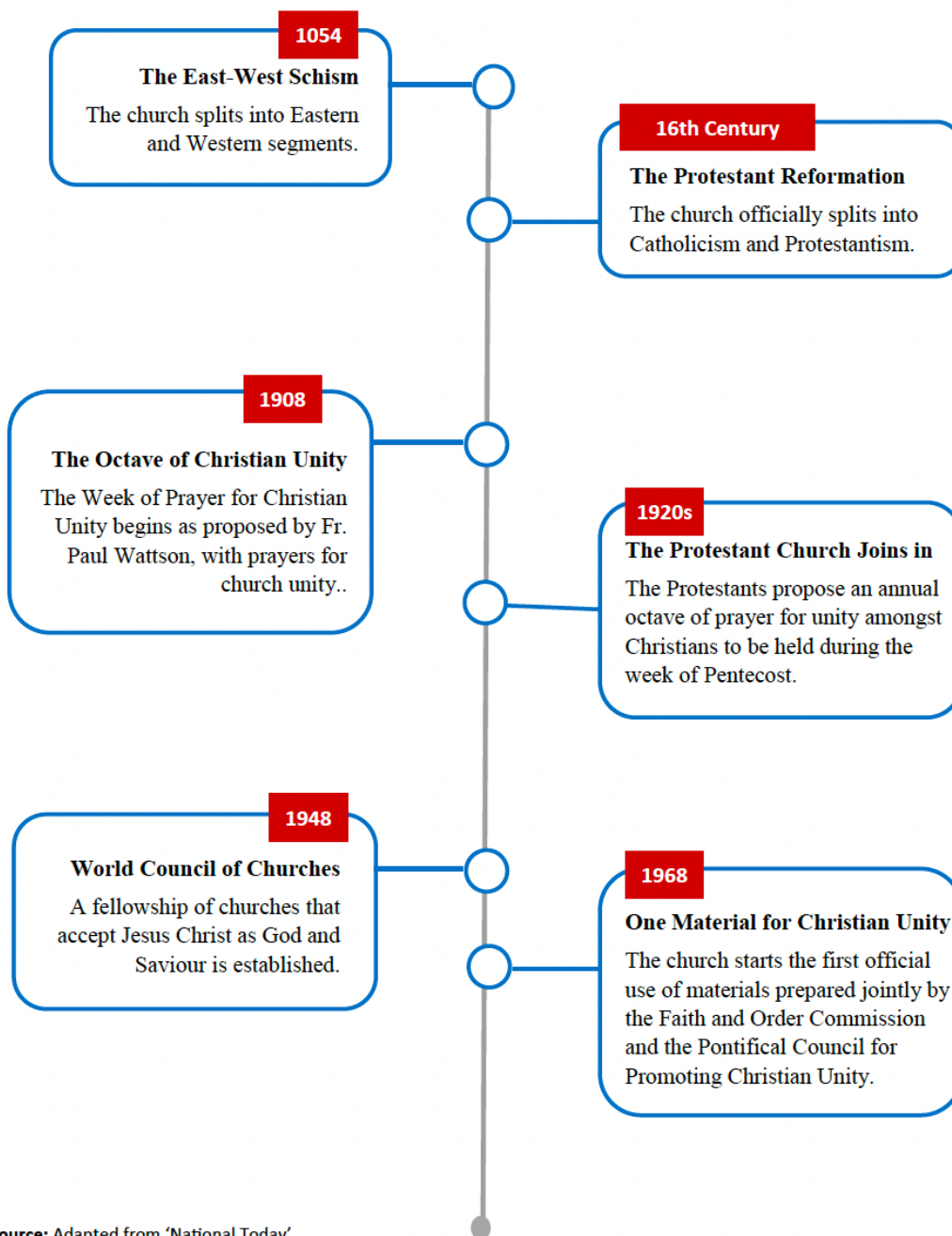
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.

All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.

Amen.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY TIMELINE



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022

Service of Prayer

A piece of dark blue cloth is hung to evoke the night sky, on which a large star is placed. Paper stars are made available for the worshippers, who are invited to come forward and add their stars to the cloth.

Introduction and welcome to worship

Today our prayer inspiration comes from the churches in the Middle East – that part of the Body of Christ geographically linked to the story of the coming of the Magi. The Magi reveal to us a unity of nations as desired by God. They travel from far-off countries and from different cultures, driven by the same hunger to see and know the new born king. This leads them to gather in the little house in Bethlehem for the simple act of giving homage and offering gifts. In our own multi-cultural society we can see some expressions of that rich variety.

At this time of year, some of us may feel we have moved on in our worship from the crib and the story of the coming of the Magi from the East. But our sisters and brothers in the Middle East invite us to focus on this story anew. Uniting with them and journeying again with the Magi, may our time together allow us to come face-to-face with our God in Christ. May our worship bring a sense of joy and wonder and allow us to respond as we go on further in our own journey of faith.

Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving and joy.

Hymn: Lord of the Church

Leader: During this service we'll be listening to the words of Matthew 2:1-12.

Let's pay attention to the beginning of that story:

Reader: Matthew 2, verses 1 and 2

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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.”

Leader: The Magi saw the star and were so moved by its appearing that they left everything and crossed the world to follow it, to find the child to whom the star pointed.

In our own lives, God invites us, too, to follow. When you arrived, you were given a paper star. Hold it now. As we hold our stars, let's take time to remember our own personal journeys towards Jesus, towards discipleship. Perhaps there was an event or a person who in our lives inspired us, a moment when we, too, were moved to follow God's invitation. Some of us will notice more than one star, more than one invitation, all leading to a deeper relationship with Jesus. Let your paper star hold the memory of your particular guiding light. And if you can't identify a star, perhaps your paper one can hold your simple desire to come closer to God.

A different leader:

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

As we pray today for the unity of the Church, may we and our communities also be lights that guide others to Jesus the Saviour.

All: **“Unite us as we come from every corner of our community to worship you, our heavenly king. Amen.”**

Reader: Matthew 2, verses 3 to 6:

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

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.”

Leader: The seekers have come so far guided by the splendour of the universe. But to find their final destination, they need the help of others and the guidance and insight of the Scriptures. They discover that God’s word “is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”. [*Psalm 119:105*]

All: **“Lord, we thank you
For those who have helped us on our journey
that led to you.
Lord, we worship you
For lighting our path through chaos and doubt
by your Holy Spirit.”**

Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you – Richard A M Gillard

Reader: Matthew 2, verses 7 and 8:
Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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.”

Leader: On our journey, at times we have to encounter people who do not have good intentions. The Magi were asked to meet with Herod in the secretive corridors of power. Herod wants only to protect his own interests and ultimately to destroy whatever he sees as threatening them. We too have to contend with voices and messages that pretend to respect the good, but end up being destructive.

All: **“Lord, we have damaged our common home
through endless consuming.
Like Herod, we seek to protect our palaces
rather than sharing the riches of human dignity.
Light our way
as together we seek the path to a better future for all.”**

Instead of this prayer, a time of silence could be held, in which a Leader asks people to focus on 'damaged our common home through endless consuming'.

Hymn: Lord Jesus Christ, your light

[*Jésus le Christ*] (Taizé)

Reader: Matthew 2: verses 9 to 10

When the wise men 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Another leader:

God our heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the gift of joy in our own lives and in the lives of all who know and love you. We pray that as we journey towards the goal of Christian unity, our lives together may give a luminous and joyful witness that leads others to know Christ.

All: We praise God, united in joy.

Reader: Matthew 2, verses 11 and 12

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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Leader: They enter the little house and see face to face the one their hearts were seeking. They worship and, opening their treasures, offer their gifts. Having encountered the Saviour, the Magi return to their countries by a different way. Similarly, may the communion we share in our prayer together inspire us to return to our lives, our churches and our world by new ways, changed by meeting the Lord.

Time here for a sermon/ homily if so wished or time for silence, stillness, with or without quiet music

Optional Intercessions:

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

Reader 1: The Magi came from the East to pay homage and to offer gifts from their cultures and countries. We pray today for Christian

communities throughout the world in their diversity of worship and tradition: Lord, preserve these treasures, particularly in areas where the presence and survival of the Church is threatened by violence and oppression.

All: **Lord hear our prayer**

Reader 2: The early years of the Lord's life were marked by massacres at the orders of the despot Herod. We pray for children living in places in the world where violence continues. Lord, inspire us to work without ceasing to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized.

All: **Lord hear our prayer**

Reader 3: After the visit of the Magi, the holy family had to flee and became refugees in the land of Egypt. We pray for all uprooted people: 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.

All: **Lord hear our prayer**

Reader 1: The birth of Jesus was announced as good news for all humanity. We pray for our efforts to seek harmony and dialogue with other faiths: Lord, give us humility and patience to walk with others with respect.

All: **Lord hear our prayer**

Reader 2: The Magi returned to their home by a different way. Lord, help us to find new and creative ways to follow you and to witness to you so that the world may believe.

All: **Lord hear our prayer**

We now return to the star, now also symbolic of our own gifts to the Christ-child.

Leader: At the beginning of our service, we were invited to hold our star, to remember our own personal journey towards Jesus, towards discipleship, recalling an event or a person who has inspired us. Or we may have simply allowed the star to represent our desire to come closer to God.

Look again at your star and this time ask for grace and strength so that you may be an influence for good. Perhaps you may ask for the opportunity to be alongside someone in need, to be their

support. Or you may simply re-affirm your desire to continue your journey of discipleship.

Pause, perhaps quiet music begins and the leader continues with the music in the background:

The Magi brought their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and willingly offered them to the Christ-child. God asks the same of you and me. Let your star become a symbol of what you have to offer, a symbol of who you are. Christ can use us all and give us the grace to be salt and light in our everyday lives, so when you are ready, please come forward to add your star to the sky.

Soft music continues until everyone is back in their place. The leader then invites everyone to stand and sing.

Hymn: We Three Kings

– John Henry Hopkins

Leader: As we open up the treasure of our giftedness and put it at the service of the Body of Christ, let us pray that God's Kingdom will come and God's will be done:

**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.**

Sending and Blessing

Leader: Go now and live as children of light.

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

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

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

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

All: **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Concluding Hymn: Shine Jesus Shine

(Graham Kendrick)

At the last verse, invite the worshippers turn to look at the exit, where the doors have been opened so people can look out and remind themselves that we are to be lights in the darkness

[weather dependent!]

Source: www.irishchurches.org

Appendix

FULL NRSV TEXT: Matthew 2:1-12

¹ 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 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.

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