

2022 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

“We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him” (Mt 2:2)

ANNOTATED ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Before you begin

The Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team encourages worship organizers to begin their planning with a review of the background information provided by those who crafted the international materials.

This year’s worship service, prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches, focuses on the feast of the Epiphany – particularly on the star which led the Magi to the Christ Child. For those who celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at a time other than January, there may be a need to re-focus the message of the Epiphany to God’s calling of all peoples and all nations to salvation.

We encourage you to enrich your understanding of the context by reading the *Introduction to the Theme* and *The Middle East Council of Churches* sections of the international 2022 WPCU booklet, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Adapting the Order of Service

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local context. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically.

COVID-19 Context

Amid the continuing realities of COVID-19, please follow your provincial guidelines for gatherings, worship and singing. You might also consider hybrid / online options for the service to encourage participation from those who are not able to attend in-person gatherings. Some pre-recorded videos for hymns and music, and other resources for online services, are available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Music

Hymns and music suggestions from the Middle East Council of Churches and from the Canadian Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Writing and Animation Team are available on www.weekofprayer.ca. Specific references are provided in the ‘Contents of the Worship Service’ (see below).

Since the use of digital resources for worship has grown in recent years, links to online video recordings of some of the music have also been included. Depending on your local context, appropriate hymns and songs that highlight this year’s theme can be substituted.

If Christians from the Middle East are present in the congregation, it would be desirable to invite them to lead the singing of some of the hymns and chants in their own languages.

Contents of the Worship Service

Opening or Processional Hymn or Song: To be sung or played; Canadian suggestions can be found in the *2022 Canadian Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Call to Worship: A call and response between the leader and the congregation

Hymn: *O Worship the King*, suggested by the Middle East Council of Churches, can be found in the *2022 International Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Prayer of Praise and Confession: Dialogical between the leader and the congregation.

Chant (Trisagion): Links to sample recordings of the ‘Trisagion’ can be found in the *2022 International Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Psalm 8: To be prayed responsively.

Chant: A Taizé chant ‘Tui Amoris Ignem’, suggested by the Middle East Council of Churches, can be found in the *2022 International Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Proclamation of the Word of God: The suggested passages of Sacred Scripture are: Isaiah 9:2-7, Ephesians 5:8-14, and Matthew 2:1-12.

Chant after the First Scripture Reading: The ‘Song of Light’ (Saint Ephrem), suggested by the Middle East Council of Churches, can be found in the *2022 International Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Gospel Acclamation: Suggestions can be found in the *2022 Canadian Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Sermon / Reflection: For ideas, see the *2022 Preaching Resource*, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Nicene Creed or other Affirmation of Faith: The Middle East Council of Churches, who prepared the service, specified the use of the *Nicene Creed*; as you consider your local context and the needs of your worshipping community, you may elect to substitute this with another affirmation of faith or omit this element.

Sharing Christ’s Light: The suggestion for symbolic action, given by the Middle East Council of Churches, is interactive and appropriate if the WPCU is celebrated in January. Spreading the light from one candle to tapers being held by congregants may also be used to indicate the unity between the Christian churches and among those present at the service.

Prayers of Intercession and The Lord's Prayer: The Leader calls the people to prayer; the intercessions are read by the Reader with the Congregation responding. This is followed by the *Lord's Prayer*.

Hymn or Song: Can be sung at this time. Some suggestions can be found in the *2022 Canadian Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Sending and Blessing: The suggested three-part prayer is based on Ephesians 5 and 6.

Parting / Recessional Hymn or Song: Some suggestions can be found in the *2022 Canadian Hymn Suggestions* resource, available on www.weekofprayer.ca.

Materials needed for the service

1. If the WPCU is celebrated in January, the suggested materials are: 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.
 - a. If the WPCU is celebrated at another time during the year, you may want to consider a small, unlit candle with a drip catcher for each person in attendance (think Christmas Eve Service or Easter Vigil).
 - b. If this option is used, 1 large, raised (tall) lit candle (think Christ candle, Easter candle) placed at the front or in the centre of the worship space + lighter.
2. Order of Service: 1 printed for each participant, with music included, or an electronic version to project.

Worship Leaders Needed for Service

Parts of the service assigned to a *Reader* may be shared among several different readers. Similarly, texts assigned to the *Leader* may be shared among clergy or leaders from the different traditions participating in the worship. These leaders may pronounce the *Sending and Blessing* together.

Specific roles:

Main worship / Service Leader (1) + Reader (1)

Prayer of Praise and Confession: Service Leader (1)

Psalm: Reader (1)

Scripture Readings: 1-3 readers (1-3)

Prayers of Intercession: Service Leader (1) + Reader (1)

Sharing of Christ's Light - Action: Depending on option chosen: person to invite the congregation to bring their stars forward (1), OR person to begin the sharing of the light from the one candle (1)

Sermon or reflection (optional): 1 homilist / preacher / speaker (1)

Sending and Blessing: Service Leader (1)

Music: pianist, organist, accompanist, cantor, or vocal lead (1-2)

Annotated Order of Worship*

L Leader*
R Reader*
C Congregation*

Opening

The clergy and other participants enter in procession while an Oriental (Middle Eastern) hymn is sung or played.

Call to Worship*

L In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*
C Amen.

L Brothers and sisters, we are united today with fellow believers in the four corners of the world as we gather to pray for the visible unity of the Church. We do this with worship resources prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches. Our texts are inspired by the visit of the Magi to the new-born King, as described in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: *“We saw the star in the East, and have come to worship him.”* Let us fix our eyes on the star that was seen in the East and allow it to lead us too.

Let us come into God’s presence with thanksgiving and joy, bringing all the sick, the suffering, the marginalized, the refugees, and the uprooted before **him***, knowing that God can dispel our **darkness* with his light***. 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.

* If you will be having this as exclusively an online service, consider including several readers for the speaking portions in their homes (including families).

* If you wish, add number of participants and their roles.

* The **Call to Worship** reminds us why God is praiseworthy and deserving of our worship, and centres our hearts and minds on Christ. It is intended to draw people into worship in the presence of God.

* The phrase **‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’** traditionally begins liturgical services or private prayer in many Eastern churches. You could adjust this language as needed in your local context.

* If you wish to use gender-neutral language, you could replace **‘him’** with **‘God’**.

* If you wish to use gender-neutral language, you could replace **‘his light’** with **‘the Light of Christ’**.

* A note about **‘light’** and **‘darkness’**: These themes come up throughout the service. Depending on your context, consider using alternate language like

L Glory be to you, **Father Almighty***, 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 just as the Magi did. We offer him ourselves today and we ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit among us.

C **Unite us with one another as we come from the North and from the South, from the East and from the West, old and young, men and women to bow down before you and offer you homage, our heavenly King. Amen.**

Hymn

O Worship the King

Prayer of Praise and Confession*

L We glorify you, O Lord, creator of heaven and earth, for you have set the lights in the vault of the sky. You separated light from darkness and arranged signs to mark sacred times, and days and years. You studded the firmament with stars. How majestic are your works, the heavens declare your glory and the skies proclaim the work of your hands!

C **We glorify you, O Lord.**

L We praise you for you did not abandon us despite our rebellion but sent your Son to brighten our darkness and be our light and our salvation. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. And the light shines in the darkness.

C **We praise you, O Lord.**

L We worship you, O Lord, for you accompany us in the chaos of our life through the power of

‘shadow’ or ‘good and evil’, particularly in places where ‘light and darkness’ language can bring up issues of race and culture.

* For many churches in the Middle East, it is traditional to call on God as ‘**Father Almighty**’. Depending on your context, you might wish to replace it with ‘Almighty God’.

* Many Christian traditions include a **prayer of confession** in worship, recognizing we are sinful people in the presence of a holy God. We confess our personal and corporate sins, expecting that God forgives as is promised to us in scripture.

your Holy Spirit. You light up our paths and give us wisdom and faith in a world of untruth and doubt.

C We worship you, O Lord.

L We thank you, O Lord, for you send us into the world to reflect this light around us, in our various churches and diverse cultures and to witness to Jesus, the one true King, offering ourselves to him.

C We thank you, O Lord.

L May all the peoples bow before you and worship you. We have often preferred darkness, but you have given us light. Therefore, we come to you confessing our sins and saying:

C We confess before you that we have turned away from your ways and disobeyed your ordinances*. We have disfigured* your good creation and squandered its resources through our consumerist practices. We have polluted your rivers and seas and poisoned your air and soil and contributed to the extinction of many species.

Silence

C We have acted selfishly towards our brothers and sisters. We have allowed our own needs and desires to prevail over our commitment to justice. We have built walls between us and planted the seeds of distrust towards the other.

Silence

C We have separated people based on ethnicity, religion and gender and we have claimed Jesus on our side in any war we waged*. Forgive all these thoughts and deeds, O Lord, as we come before you in repentance.

* 'Ordinances' can be replaced with 'laws' or 'commandments'.

* 'Disfigured' can be replaced with 'harmed', 'misused', or 'exploited'.

* The phrase 'in any war we waged' could be replaced with 'at times of conflict'.

Silence

L Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you have sent in the fullness of time to redeem all the people, we ask you to have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and transform us into his glorious image so we can shine as a beacon of hope in our troubled world.

Silence

L Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

C Thanks be to God, whom we praise with all our voices.

Chant

*Trisagion**

Holy God!
Holy Mighty!
Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Psalm 8 (*responsively*)

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

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

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

C what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

R Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.

C You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

* **Trisagion** is a standard hymn or prayer in most Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Eastern Catholic Churches. 'Trisagion' translates as 'Thrice Holy' and describes God as holy in three different categories.

R all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

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

Chant*

Tui Amoris Ignem

First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

Chant

Song of Light (Saint Ephrem)

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel Acclamation* (*sung*)

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon

Moment of silence or hymn

Nicene Creed (according to the tradition of the Eastern Churches)*

C We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

* A song, hymn or prayer calling on the Holy Spirit to be present and illumine the reading of the Word. In some traditions, this would be a prayer for illumination.

* The **Gospel Acclamation** sets up and calls special attention to the Gospel Reading by making a statement of faith in Jesus, setting the words of Christ apart from the other readings.

* This version of the **Creed** is optional, depending on local context. Those who do not profess a Creed can place their own prayer or affirmation of faith here, or extend their time of silent prayer.

**God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin
Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius
Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living
and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver
of life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and
glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic
Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness
of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Sharing Christ's Light*

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.

L 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

* Sensitive to the fact that not all celebrate the WPCU in January, you may wish to change the focus of the Epiphany story from the star to the openness and outpouring of God's love to all peoples, and the various treasures we bring to God and to each other. As a result, you will need to alter the next prayer.

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 Church. As we journey towards that goal, may our lives together give a luminous witness that leads others to know Christ.

Prayers of Intercession

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

R The Magi came from the East to pay homage and offer special gifts from their cultures and countries.

We pray today for all Christian communities around the world in all of their diversity of worship and tradition:

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.

C O, Lord hear our prayer (*spoken or sung*)

R The early years of **the Lord's life*** were marked by violence and massacres at the orders of **the despot*** Herod.

We pray for children living in places in the world where violence continues and where its results are tangible:

Strengthen, O Lord, the bonds of unity and mutual love among our churches and help us to cooperate and witness to your holy Name.

Inspire us to work without ceasing in order **to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized***. Encourage us to stand together in the face of **tyranny and oppressive regimes*** as we seek your Kingdom among us.

C O, Lord, hear our prayer

R After the visit of the Magi, the Holy Family

* For many churches in the Middle East, it is traditional to call on God as '**Father, Son and Holy Spirit**'. Depending on your context, you could replace this with 'Three Persons in One'.

* Depending on your context, you could replace '**the Lord's life**' with 'Jesus' life'.

* Depending on your context, you could omit '**the despot**' or use other language.

* You could adjust the phrase '**to defend the oppressed and include the marginalized**' – for example, 'to defend and include the oppressed and the marginalized' – or use other language appropriate for your context.

* You could replace '**tyranny and oppressive regimes**' with 'injustice and oppression', or with other language appropriate for your context.

experienced **migration*** through the wilderness and became refugees in the land of Egypt.

We pray for all the 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.

C O, Lord, hear our prayer

R The birth of Jesus was good news for all, gathering people from different nations and religions in worship 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 on their journey.

C O, Lord, hear our prayer

R 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 to you so that the world may believe.

C O, Lord, hear our prayer

R When the Magi saw the holy child, they rejoiced with great joy.

Heavenly Father, fix our eyes on him so we do not lose our way.

Unite us in the Lord Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and who has taught us to pray, saying:

C Our Father in heaven...

Hymn

Sending and Blessing*

L Go now and live as children of light.

C For the fruit of the light is found in all that is

* You could use 'exile' instead of '**migration**'.

* As a close to the service, the **Sending and Blessing** sends the people out with the promise that God goes with them from worship into the world.

good and right and true.

L Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness.

C Let us wake from sleep and Christ will shine upon us.

L 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.

C Amen. Thanks be to God.

Parting Hymn