



Discipleship at Leicester Cathedral



THE COMMUNITY OF THE
TREE OF LIFE

PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

A SUGGESTED 60-MIN PRAYER GUIDE

Below you will find a centring prayer, Scripture, and a range of ‘prayer actions’. Please feel free to use what you want. Permission to dip in and out, follow the suggested timings or go at your own pace.

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Depending on what ‘prayer action’ you choose to take, you may need a Bible a journal or pen and paper, and a device with WIFI. You may also like to print this resource out – scroll down to find out more before entering prayer.

INTRO

January 18th-25th is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU). Within this week, you are invited to take part in 24 hours of non-stop prayer with other Christians in Leicestershire and beyond. During WPCU, Christians are called to join together in praying for:

- Transparency and accountability from churches in dealing with the world and with each other.
- Cooperation to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displace, to relieve the burdened, and to build a just and honest society.
- 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.

The theme for WPCU 2022 has been created by churches in the Middle East, by Christians who both recognise and experience the difficulties and travails brought by conflict. “We Saw His Star in the East” reflects on the journey of the Magi to find the baby Jesus. You can find full resources for WPCU here: <https://ctbi.org.uk/resources-for-week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2022/>.

The story of the Magi visiting the Holy Family in Bethlehem is a very familiar one. The Magi have sometimes been seen as a symbol of the world’s diversity – different religions and cultures – that come to pay homage to the Christ-child. As we think of this story, we might, therefore, think about how it represents the unity of all creation that God desires.

CENTRING & SILENCE [5 mins]

Get into a comfortable posture and pray,

'As we enter prayer now, we pause to be still, slow our breathing, and centre ourselves in the abiding presence of Christ'

Bring your attention to your breath. Treat each breath in as an arrival. Breathe in God's presence. As you breath out, imagine letting go of future worries and responsibilities to God. Become present.

OPENING SCRIPTURES [5 min]

Matthew 2: 1-2 [NIV]

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? **We saw His star in the east** and have come to worship Him.

2 Corinthians 13:11 [NIV]

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

STAR GAZING [15 MINS]

Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

In a world that was tumultuous and full of conflict, the Magi looked up and saw a sign of hope in the darkness. Our world today is also full of crisis and suffering and it can be hard to see the light. But, as the Churches Together prayer resource reminds us:

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. Yet divisions dim the light of Christian witness and obscure the way, preventing others from finding their way to Christ. Conversely, Christians united in their worship of Christ, and opening their treasures in an exchange of gifts, become a sign of the unity that God desires for all of creation.

- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022', London, 2021, p.4 < <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/WPCU-2022-English-A5-1.pdf>.pagespeed.ce.c2Ohs37kOX.pdf>

Spend some time star gazing – allowing the darkness to illuminate the points of light and hope. What treasures can you discover? You may like to gaze at this photograph, follow this

link on an online planetarium (<https://stellarium-web.org/>), or perhaps (if you're praying on a clear night), go outside and look up!



EXAMEN [15 mins]

An examen is a spiritual practice created by priest and theologian St Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. It is a prayer of thankful reflection; a walk through your recent past with God, noticing and naming His presence in both joyful and difficult moments, and asking God to help you resolve how to live well in the future. This examen will help you to reflect on where you have seen unity over the past year, and where you might hope to see more unity in the coming year.

Here are some steps to lead you through an examen practice...

// STEP ONE: RELISH

In a position that is comfortable for you, bring your attention to your breath. Treat each breath in as an arrival, settling into God's presence. As you breath out, imagine letting go of

future worries and responsibilities to God. When you are ready, begin to give God thanks for the unity that you see in your own life, and the blessings this brings.

// STEP TWO: REQUEST

Ask God to lead you through this practise and to see things through His loving eyes.

// STEP THREE: REVIEW PART ONE

Looking back, can you remember a time over the last year where you experienced a sense of unity:

- Within the global Church?
- Within your own faith community or Church, or amongst Christians in your local area?
- In your own personal life, between you and the people around you?

What did unity feel like? What created the sense of unity? Speak with God about what you see. What happened? Who was there? What were you feeling in this situation? What was the outcome. Imagine yourself and God watching this moment together side by side.

// STEP FOUR: REVIEW PART TWO

Look forward to the coming year. Where do you hope to see a greater sense of unity:

- Amongst Christians globally?
- In your local area or community?
- In your life personally?

// STEP FIVE: REPENT

Speak to God about what you see. Lean into the difficult emotions and the missed opportunities for being part of creating that sense of unity. Ask for God's forgiveness, or for healing. Ask God to bring a renewed sense of hope in places of disunity.

// STEP SIX: RESOLVE

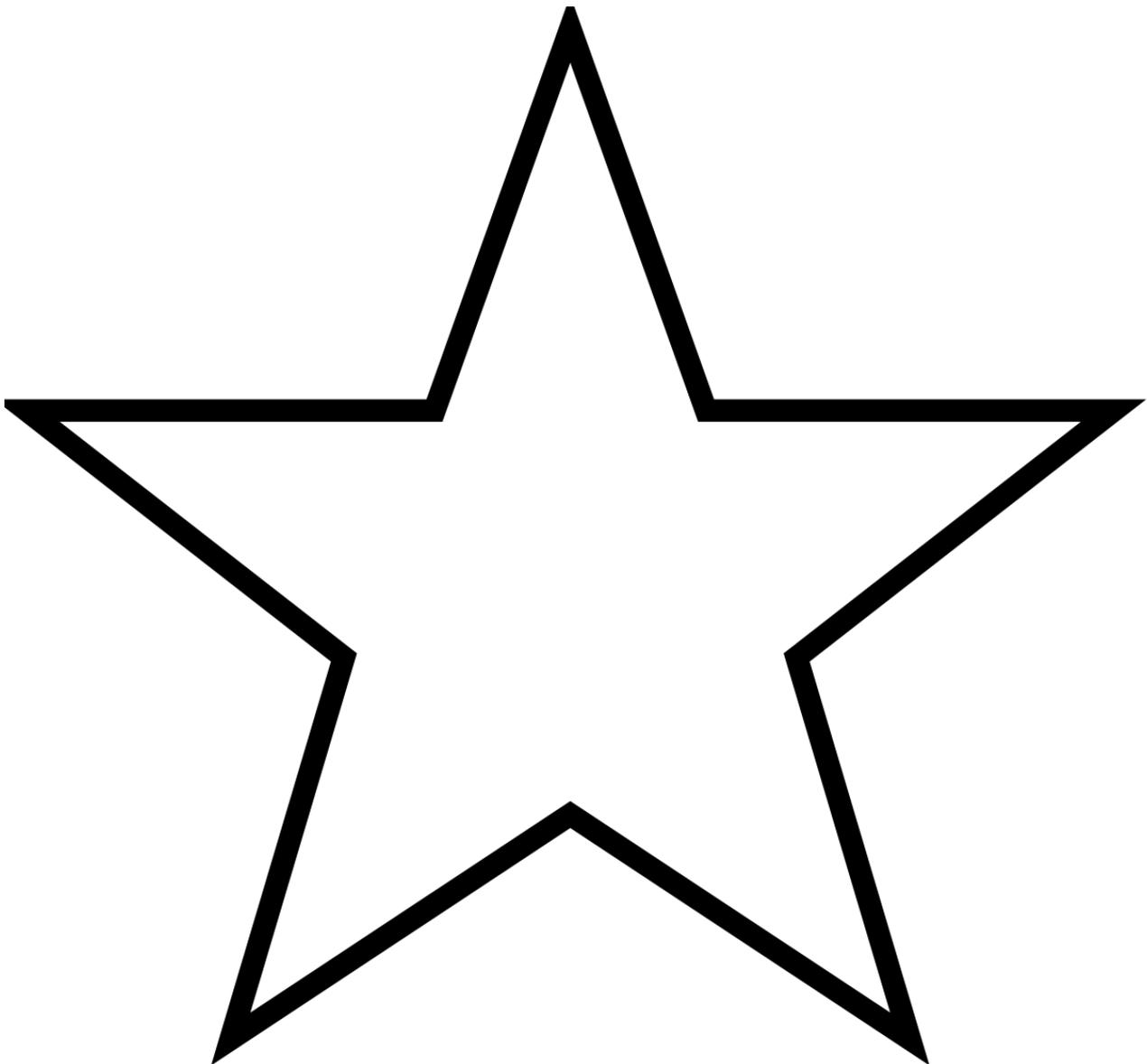
Noticing and naming your deepest emotions, what is God saying? How is he asking you to reimagine your responses to disunity? How can you play a part in building unity?

Give thanks to God for this moment.

“WE SAW HIS STAR IN THE EAST” [15 MINS]

Just as the Magi journeyed to a far off land to worship the Christ-child, how might God be calling you to new places, to pray with new people and in new ways?

Like the five points on this star, what are five ways that you could begin to take steps towards unity amongst Christians and all of God’s creation? You may like to write your ideas down on the points of this star, in your journal or on your phone.



Here are some suggested actions:

- Organise your own 24-hour prayer event with people in your church.

- Pray with someone you have never prayed with before.
- Find out about [Circle of Influence and Circle of Concern](#). How might God be calling you to exercise your personal leadership?
- Link with another church or other Christians passionate about Christian unity and commit to praying together.

CLOSING PRAYER [5 MINS]

Christ our light,
We thank you for the Magi
And those who have journeyed before us
In hardship and joy,
Paving the way for us to worship and serve you today.
Transform our prejudice and discomfort
Into celebration for all the diversity you have given us.

God of unity,
As we search for signs of hope
Our eyes strain to see the star.
As the darkness births the light,
We pray that all would come to worship you
Together in your Kingdom,
Forevermore.
Amen

// Take a moment to give us some feedback about this prayer resource:

<https://us19.listmanage.com/survey?u=cbd6384064124b364f971d785&id=86cdc9720a&tribution=false>

// For more downloadable 60-minute prayer resources: <http://leicestertreeoflife.org/prayer>