

IMPORTANT

This is the **international** version of the text
of the Week of Prayer 2022

Kindly contact your local Bishops' Conference or Synod
of your Church to obtain an adaptation of this text for your local context

Resources for
THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
and throughout the year

2022

We saw the star in the East, and we came
to worship him

(Mt 2:2)

Jointly prepared and published by
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The search for unity: throughout the year

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the Week of Prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

Adapting the text

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

Using the Week of Prayer material

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the Week of Prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the Week of Prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the Week of Prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".
- Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the Week of Prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2022

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, 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." 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."

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

New Revised Standard Version

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2022

We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him

(Mt 2:2)

According to the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-12), the appearance of the star in the sky of Judea represents a long-awaited sign of hope, that leads the Magi, and indeed all peoples of the earth, to the place where the true king and Saviour is revealed. This star is a gift, an indication of God's loving presence for all humanity. To the Magi it was a sign that a king was born. With its rays, it leads humanity towards a greater light, Jesus, the new light who enlightens every person and who leads us into the glory of the Father and the splendour of his radiance. Jesus is the light who has come into our darkness when, by the Holy Spirit, he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became human. Jesus is the light who went even further into the darkness of the world when for our sake and for our salvation, he emptied himself and became obedient unto death. He did this to light our way to the Father, so that we might come to know the Father and know the love he has for us, who gave his only Son for us, so that believing in him we might not perish but have eternal life.

The Magi saw the star and followed it. Traditionally commentators have seen in the figures of the Magi a symbol of the diversity of peoples known at that time, and a sign of the universality of the divine call which appears in the light of the star shining from the east. They also see in the Magi's eager search for the new-born king, all humanity's hunger for truth, for goodness and for beauty. Humanity has been longing for God since the beginning of creation in order to give him homage. The star appeared as the divine child was born in the fullness of time. It heralded God's long-awaited act of salvation which begins in the mystery of the incarnation.

The Magi reveal to us the unity of all nations desired by God. They travel from far-off countries, and represent diverse cultures, yet they are driven by the same hunger to see and know the new-born king, and are gathered into the little house in Bethlehem in the simple act of giving homage and offering gifts. Christians are called to be a sign to the world of God bringing about this unity that he desires. Drawn from different cultures, races and languages, Christians share in a common search for Christ and a common desire to worship him. The mission of the Christian people, therefore, is to be a sign like the star, to guide humanity in its hunger for God, to lead all to Christ, and to be the means by which God is bringing about the unity of all peoples.

Part of the Magi's act of homage is to open their treasures, to offer their gifts, which from Christian antiquity, have been understood as signs of different aspects of Christ's identity: gold for his royalty; incense for his divinity; and myrrh foreshadowing his death. The diverse gifts, therefore, provide us with an image of the particular insights that different Christian traditions have into the person and work of Jesus. When Christians gather together and open their treasures and their hearts in homage to Christ, all are enriched as the gifts of these insights are shared.

The star rose in the east (Mt 2:2). It is from the east that the sun rises, and from what is called the Middle East that salvation appeared by the mercy of our God who blessed us with *the dawn from on high* (Lk 1:78). But the history of the Middle East was, and still is, characterized by conflict and strife, tainted with blood and darkened by injustice and oppression. Most recently, since the Palestinian Nakba (the exodus of Palestine's Arab population during the 1948 war) the region has seen a series of bloody wars and revolutions and the rise of religious extremism. The story of the Magi also contains many dark elements, most particularly Herod's despotic orders to massacre all the children around Bethlehem who were less than two years old (Mt 2:16-18). The cruelty of these narratives resonates with the long history and difficult present of the Middle East.

It was in the Middle East that the Word of God took root and bore fruit: thirty and sixty and one hundredfold. And from this east that the apostles set out to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Middle East gave 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 serene 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. Various parties stake their claim to it and disregard others.

Even prayer in Jerusalem has become subject to political and military measures. 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 its people. The star of Bethlehem is a sign that God walks with his people, feels their pain, hears their cries, and shows them compassion. It reassures us that though circumstances change and terrible disasters may happen, God's faithfulness is unfailing. The Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps. He walks beside his people and brings them back when they are lost or in danger. The journey of faith is this walking with God who always watches over his people and who guides us in the complex paths of history and life.

For this Week of Prayer, the Christians of the Middle East chose the theme of the star that rose in the east for a number of reasons. While many Western Christians celebrate Christmas, the more ancient feast, and still the principal feast of many Eastern Christians, is the epiphany when God's salvation is revealed to the nations in Bethlehem and at the Jordan. This focus on the theophany (the manifestation) is, in a sense, a treasure which Christians of the Middle East can offer to their brothers and sisters around the world.

The star leads the Magi through the tumult of Jerusalem where Herod plots the murder of innocent life. Still today, and in various parts of the world, innocents suffer violence and the threat of violence, and young families flee tyrants such as Herod and Augustus. In this context people look for a sign that God is with them. They 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 being such a star the Church becomes a sign of hope in a world of troubles and a sign of God's presence with his people, accompanying them through the difficulties of life. By word and through action Christians are called to light the way so that Christ might be revealed, once again, to the nations. But the divisions between us 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 his creation.

The Christians of the Middle East offer these resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity conscious that the world shares many of the travails and difficulties that they experience, and yearns for a light to lead the way to the Saviour who can overcome darkness. The COVID-19 global pandemic, the ensuing economic crisis, and the failure of political, economic and social structures to protect the weakest and most vulnerable, have underlined the global need for a light to shine in the darkness. The star that shone in the east, the Middle East, two thousand years ago still calls us to the manger, to where Christ is born. It draws us to where the Spirit of God is alive and active, to the reality of our baptism, and to the transformation of our hearts.

After encountering the Saviour and worshipping him together, the Magi return to their countries by a different way, having been warned in a dream. Similarly, the communion we share in our prayer together must inspire us to return to our lives, our churches and our world by new ways. Travelling by new ways is an invitation to repentance and renewal in our personal lives, in our churches and in our societies. Following Christ *is* our new path, and in a volatile and changing world Christians must remain as fixed and determined as the constellations and the shining planets. But what does this mean in practice? Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to defending human dignity, especially in the poorest, the weakest and those marginalized. 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 future that accords to God's heart, a future in which all human beings can experience life, peace, justice, and love. The new way between the churches is the way of visible unity that we sacrificially seek with courage and audacity so that, day after day, "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2022

The international group appointed jointly by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches to prepare the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was unable to meet face-to-face this year due to the current pandemic, and therefore had to work on these texts remotely.

The PCPCU had entrusted the Middle East Council of Churches based in Beirut, Lebanon, with the task of choosing the theme and preparing draft texts for the Week of Prayer 2022. They chose the theme, “We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him” (Mt 2:2). More than ever, in these difficult times, we need a light that shines in the darkness and that light, Christians proclaim, has been manifested in Jesus Christ.

In a region of the world where human rights are habitually trampled underfoot by unjust political and economic interests, in the face of an unprecedented international health crisis and bearing the human and material consequences of the serious explosion that devastated Beirut on August 4, 2020, the local ecumenical group nevertheless made every effort to present the results of its work by participating in the online meetings. We thank them wholeheartedly and pray that greater unity among Christians in the Middle East and around the world may contribute to a more dignified, just and peaceful life for all men and women in our time and in the times to come.

Participants in the International Team

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ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Instructions for those preparing the worship

During this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Christians from many different traditions and confessions around the world gather to pray for the unity of all baptized. This year's materials and worship service have been prepared by the Middle East Council of Churches. The selection of scripture and liturgical texts is inspired by the visit of the Magi to the new-born King, as described in Matthew 2:1-12, particularly verse 2: "*We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him.*"

Some suggested music is attached in the appendix. 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 these hymns and chants in their own languages. 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 in the appendix. Depending on your local context, appropriate hymns and songs that highlight this year's theme can be substituted.

Several items should be prepared for the part of the service entitled '*Sharing Christ's Light*'. First, a piece of dark blue cloth to be strategically hung to evoke the night sky. Second, a large star which will be hung on the cloth. Third, small paper stars for the worshippers. Depending on the context, all of those present may be invited to take a star and hang it on the '*sky*', as an offering to the heavenly king. Alternatively, representatives can be selected to do so on behalf of the various groups and communions participating in the worship.

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 and communions participating in the worship. These leaders may pronounce the *Sending* and *Blessing* together.

Order of Worship

- L Leader
- R Reader
- C Congregation

Opening

The clergy and other participants enter in procession while an Oriental hymn is sung or played.¹

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 observed his star in the East, and have come to pay him homage.*" 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.

- 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 (p. 17)

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 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.**

1. See Appendix for suggestions (p.17).

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.

(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 Trisagion²

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,**

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 Ignem³

2. A number of versions from the Eastern and Oriental traditions are suggested in the Appendix (p. 20).

3. Taizé chant. A version in Arabic can be found in the Appendix (p. 19).

First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

Chant

Song of Light⁴ (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)*

**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,
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.**

4. English translation and link to a recording can be found in the Appendix (p. 18-19).

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 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 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 Blessing⁵

L Go now and live as children of light.

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

5. Based on Ephesians 5 and 6.

APPENDIX*

O Worship the King

(Hanover)

Robert Grant

William Croft, 1708

1. O wor-ship the King, all glo-rious a - bove; O grate - ful - ly
 2. O tell of his might, O sing of his grace, whose robe is the
 3. The earth with its store of won - ders un - told, Al - migh - ty thy
 4. Thy boun - ti - ful care what tongue can re - cite? It breathes in the
 5. Frail chil-dren of dust, and fee - ble as frail, in thee do we
 6. O mea-sure-less might, in - ef - fa - ble love, while an - gels de -

8
 sing his pow'r and his love; our shield and de - fen - der, the
 light, whose ca - no - py space; his cha - riots of wrath the deep
 pow'r hath foun - ded of old; hath sta - blished it fast by a
 air, it shines in the light; it streams from the hills it de -
 trust, nor find thee to fail; thy mer - cies how ten - der, how
 light to hymn thee a - bove, thy hum - bler cre - a - tion, though

14
 An - cient of Days, pa - vi - lioned in splen-dour and gir - ded with praise.
 thun - der clouds form, and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.
 change-less de - cree, and round it hath cast, like a man - tle the sea.
 scends to the plain, and sweet - ly dis - tils in the dew and the rain.
 firm to the end, Our Ma - ker, De - fen - der, Re - dee - mer, and Friend.
 fee - ble their lays, with true a - do - ra - tion shall sing to thy praise.

From Hymnary.org (based on a score from the Cyber Hymnal)
 Public Domain
 ST. MARY'S CATHEDRAL KUALA LUMPUR, 10.30 AM CHOIR

* These hymns have been suggested by the Middle East Council of Churches, which prepared the first project of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022, and are published under its responsibility.

تسبحة النور لمار أفرام السرياني

يسوع ربُّنا المسيحُ
أشرقَ لنا مِن حشا أبيه

فجاء وأنقذنا مِنَ الظُّلمةِ
وبنوره الوهَّاج أنارنا

إندفقَ النَّهار على البشر

وانهزم سلطان اليل

مِن نوره شرقَ علينا نورُ
وأنا يونا المظلمه

سنيَّ مجده أفاض على المسكونه
وأنا اللجج السفلى

مات الموتُ وبأد الظلام
وتحطمت أبواب الجحيم

وأنا جميع البرايا
ومظلمة كانت منذ القديم

قام الأمواتُ الرّاقدون في التُّراب
ومجدوا لأنّه صار لهم مُخلِّص

عملَ خلاصًا ووهب لنا الحياة
وصعدَ إلى أبيه العليّ

وانّه أت بمجدٍ عظيم
ينير العيون التي انتظرتّه

English translation

Song of Light (Saint Ephrem)

The Light of the just and joy of the upright is Christ Jesus our Lord.

Begotten of the Father, he manifested himself to us.

He came to rescue us from darkness

and to fill us with the radiance of his light.

Day is dawning upon us; the power of darkness is fading away.

From the true Light there arises for us

the light which illumines our darkened eyes.

His glory shines upon the world

and enlightens the very depths of the abyss.

Death is annihilated, night has vanished, and the gates of Sheol are broken.

Creatures lying in darkness from ancient times are clothed in light.

The dead arise from the dust and sing because they have a Saviour.

He brings salvation and grants us life.

He ascends to his Father on high.

He will return in glorious splendour

and shed his light on those gazing upon him.

TAIZÉ CHANT

Tui amoris ignem

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems. The first system has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is simple, with lyrics: HA-LOU-MA YA ROUHA 'L-LAH AD-RE-M FI NA NAR AL-MA-HAB-BA. The piano accompaniment consists of chords. The second system also has a treble clef and one sharp. The melody continues with lyrics: HA-LOU-MA YA ROUHA 'L-LAH HA-LOU-MA YA ROUHA'L-LAH. The piano accompaniment continues with chords.

♪ Ven, Es-pí-ri-tu de Dios y de tu a-mor en-cien-de la lla-ma. Ven Es-pí-ri-tu de a-mor. / **Ho-ly Spir-it, come to us**, kin-dle in us the fire of your love. Ho-ly Spir-it, come to us, Ho-ly Spir-it, come to us. / Vem Es-pí-ri-to de a-mor, **vem a-cen-der em nós o teu fo-go**. Vem Es-pí-ri-to de a-mor, vem Es-pí-ri-to de a-mor. / **Šven-to-ji Dva-sia a-teik**, tu sa-vo mei-lès ug-nj už-đe-ki. Šven-to-ji Dva-sia a-teik, Šven-to-ji Dva-sia a-teik. /

هَلِّمُ يَا رُوحَ اللَّهِ أَضْرِمِ فِينَا نَارَ الْمَحَبَّةِ
هَلِّمُ يَا رُوحَ اللَّهِ ، هَلِّمُ يَا رُوحَ اللَّهِ

(Viens Saint-Esprit, allume le feu de ton amour. / Komm Heiliger Geist, entzünde das Feuer deiner Liebe. / Vieni, Spirito Santo, accendi il fuoco del tuo amore. / Przyjdź, Duchu Święty, rozpal ogień Twej miłości. / Прииди, Святой Дух, зажги огонь Твоей любви.)

Music: Jacques Berthier (1923-1994), copyright © Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France

TRISAGION

In English and Greek: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ6of7Vij5w>

In Syriac: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLBEzlUt2EA>

In Armenian <https://youtu.be/gPM-BKYVpNE>

SYRIAC HYMN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nno6k0i8zd4>

Hutomo: Mshiho Ethiled

Qolo: Mshiho Ethiled (Ferdo Trayono)

Mode: 2, 6

ܘܫܝܗܘ ܐܬܝܠܥܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ

ܘܠܗܘܐ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ (ܦܝܪܘܢܐ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ)

ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ

$\text{♩} = 80$ 67

Mshi - ho e - thi - leḗ : bghaw Be - thel - ḥem :
 msha - lin waw wom - rin : day - ko e - thi - leḗ :

wmén ma - den - ḥo ; Mghu - shé e - thaw -
 mal - ko dlash - lo - meh ; e - thayn dneb - ruk -

li - qo - reh :
 wnes ghud - leh ✠

Mshiho e-thi-leḗ bghaw Bethelḥem,
 wmén ma-den-ḥo Mghushé é-thaw li-
 qo-reh. msha-lin waw wom-rin day-ko
 e-thi-leḗ, mal-ko dlash-lo-meh é-thayn
 dneb-ruk wnes-ghud leh.

ܘܫܝܗܘ ܐܬܝܠܥܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ
 ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ ܘܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܩܠܡܝܢ

Christ was born in Bethlehem, and from the East the Magi came to honor Him. They were asking, "Where was the king born? For we came to greet, bless, and worship Him!"

We Three Kings of Orient Are

1 We three kings of O - ri - ent are; bear - ing gifts we tra - verse a -
 2 Born a king on Beth-le-hem's plain, gold I bring to crown him a -
 3 Frank-in - cense to of - fer have I; in - cense owns a de - i - ty
 4 Myrrh is mine; its bit - ter per - fume breathes a life of gath - er - ing
 5 Glo - rious now be - hold him a - rise, King and God and Sac - er - i -

far, field and foun-tain, moor and moun-tain, fol - low-ing yon - der star.
 gain; king for - ev - er, ceas - ing nev - er, o - ver us all to reign.
 nigh; prayer and prais-ing, glad - ly rais - ing, wor-ship-ing God Most High.
 gloom; sor - row-ing, sigh - ing, bleed-ing, dy - ing, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.
 fice; heav'n sings al - le - lu - ia: al - le - lu - ia the earth re - plies.

Refrain

Oh, star of won - der, star of night, star with roy - al beau - ty

bright; west-ward lead - ing, still pro-ceed-ing, guide us to thy per - fect light!

Lord the light of your love

(Shine Jesus shine)

Capo 2(G)

Graham Kendrick

Majestic and steady

A D/A E/A D/A A D/A

E/A D/A A D/A A E/A

1. Lord, the light of your love is shin - ing,

A D/A A E/A D E/D

in the midst of the dark - ness, shin - ing; Je - sus, Light of the

C#m F#m D E/D C#m F#m

World, shine up - on us, set us free by the truth you now bring us.

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

DAY 1

“We observed his star in the East” (Mt 2:2)

Raise us up and draw us to your perfect light

Readings

- Zech 4:1-7 I see a lampstand all of gold
Ps 139:1-10 Your right hand shall hold me fast
2 Tim 1:7-10 This grace... has now been revealed through the appearing
of our Saviour Christ Jesus
Jn 16:7-14 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

Reflection

In this fragile and uncertain world, we look for a light, a ray of hope from afar. In the midst of evil, we long for goodness. We look for the good within ourselves, but so often we are overwhelmed by our weakness that hope fails us. Our confidence rests in the God we worship. God, in his wisdom, enabled us to hope for divine intervention; but we had not anticipated that God's intervention would be a person, and that the Lord himself would be the light in our midst. This exceeded all our expectations. God's gift to us is a 'spirit of power, and love'. Not by relying on our own strength and ability are we drawn forward on the way to this perfect light, but rather by God's Holy Spirit.

In the midst of humanity's darkness the star from the East shone. In it we see a light that penetrates the depths of the darkness that separates us from one another. The star's light was not only an illumination at a particular historical moment but it continues to shine and change the face of history. Throughout the ages, and ever since the star first appeared, the world has come to know through the lives of Christ's followers the hope that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. These give witness to God's work in history, and to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Despite the vicissitudes of history and the changing of circumstances, the Risen One continues to shine, moving within the flow of history like a beacon guiding all into this perfect light and overcoming the darkness which separates us from one another.

The desire to overcome the darkness that separates us compels us to pray and work for Christian unity.

Prayer

Lord God, illumine our path by the light of Christ who moves before us and leads us. Enlighten us and dwell within us. Guide us to discover a small manger in our hearts where a great light still sleeps. Creator of light, we thank you for the gift of that unfading Star, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. May he be a beacon for our pilgrimage. Heal our divisions and draw us closer to the Light that we may find our unity in him. Amen.

DAY 2

“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” (Mt 2:2)

Humble leadership breaks down walls and builds up with love

Readings

Jer 23:1-6 He shall reign as king and deal wisely
Ps 46 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth
Phil 2:5-11 Who... did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited
Mt 20:20-28 The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve

Reflection

Jeremiah denounces the bad leadership of the kings of Israel who divided and scattered the people. There was a leadership that destroyed nations and drove their citizens into exile. In contrast, the Lord promises a shepherd-king who will ‘execute justice and righteousness in the land’ and gather together the members of his flock.

Our world craves good leadership and is constantly seeking someone who will fulfil this desire. Where can one find such a leader? Only in Christ have we seen the example of a king or leader after God’s heart. As we are called to follow him, we are also called to emulate his way of servant-kingship in the world and in the Church. In Christ we encounter one who does not tear down and divide but builds up and makes whole for the glory of God’s name. His rule is not self-serving and he does not use force. Rather in Him we encounter a loving, humble servant who does not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. He is one who comes to serve, rather than be served, and his followers are called to do the same.

Today, the Middle East is experiencing the loss of its people to exile as ‘righteousness and justice’ are becoming scarce commodities not only there but throughout the world. Yet we have a hope that will not be shaken even if ‘the nations are in an uproar’ and ‘the kingdoms totter’ around us.

Leaders, both in the world and in the Church, have responsibility to bring together rather than to scatter or divide the people of God. So much division in the world and in the Church is caused by the desire for position, power and self-advantage. The more faithfully Christians emulate the servant leadership of Christ the more division in both the world and the Church will be overcome. As we work for righteousness, justice and peace for the wellbeing of all, we witness humbly to the shepherd-king, and draw others into His presence.

Prayer

God, our only refuge and strength, we glorify you for you are a just and righteous God. We confess before you that we often covet worldly models of leadership. Help us to seek our Lord Jesus Christ not in the palaces of the powerful but in the humble manger and to emulate him in his meekness. Encourage us to empty ourselves as we serve each other in obedience to you.

We pray in the name of Christ who with you and with the Holy Spirit reigns forever in glory. Amen.

DAY 3

“When king Herod heard this he was disturbed,
and all Jerusalem with him” (Mt 2:3)

The presence of Christ, turning the world upside down

Readings

Neh 4:18-21 So we laboured ... from break of dawn until the stars came out
Ps 2:1-10 Why do the nations conspire...?
2 Thess 2:13-3; 5 But the Lord is faithful, he will strengthen you
Mt 2:1-5 He was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him

Reflection

The Lord has come amongst us. Christ's coming disturbs the ways of the world. In contrast to so many national leaders, the Lord comes in humility denouncing the evil of injustice and oppression that accompanies the ambition for power and status. The coming of Jesus calls for a change of heart and a transformation of life, so that people will be liberated from all that dehumanizes them and causes them suffering. Jesus shows us that God is with those who suffer because each person has a dignity as God's beloved child. Thus, Jesus' presence creates disturbance precisely because He rocks the boat of the rich and the powerful who work only for their own interests and neglect the common good. But, for those who work for peace and unity, Christ's coming brings the light of hope.

Today, we are invited to commit ourselves to the constructive action of making justice a reality in our world. This implies the need to reflect and acknowledge the instances when our ways are not God's ways of justice and peace. When Christians work together for justice and peace our efforts are more powerful. And when Christians work together in this way, the answer to our prayer for Christian unity is made visible such that others recognise in us Christ's presence in the world today. Through our words and actions, we can bring the light of hope to so many who are still living in the darkness of political unrest, social poverty, and structural discrimination. The Good News is that God is faithful, and He is always the one strengthening us and protecting us from harm, and inspiring us to work for the good of others, especially those living in the darkness of suffering, hatred, violence and pain.

Prayer

O Lord, you have guided us out of darkness to Jesus. You have illumined the star of hope in our lives. Help us to be united in our commitment to bring about your Reign of love, justice and peace and so to be the light of hope to all those living in the darkness of despair and disillusionment. Take our hand, Lord, so we can see you in our daily lives. As we follow you, remove our fear and anxiety. Shine your light upon us and set our hearts on fire so that your love surrounds us with warmth. Lift us up to you, you who have emptied yourself for our sake, so that our lives may glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

DAY 4

“And you, Bethlehem... are by no means least” (Mt 2:6)

Though small and suffering, we lack nothing

Readings

Mic 5:2-5a, 7-8 From you shall come forth ... one who is to rule in Israel
Ps 23 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want
1 Pet 2: 21-25 Now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls
Lk 12:32-40 Do not be afraid, little flock

Reflection

From the small and lowly city of Bethlehem, the Lord, the Son of God, made his entrance into the world. From the womb of a humble village girl, he took human flesh, and chose to live his humanity in obscurity and simplicity. He became a grain in the field, yeast in the dough, and a small ray of light to our eyes, and that light has filled the earth. Out of the obscurity of Ephrata has come a ruler, the shepherd and guardian of our souls. And though he is our shepherd, he became the Lamb who carried the sins of the world that we might be healed.

Though of little significance among the great clans of Judah, Bethlehem was made great because of the birth of the Shepherd of all shepherds, the King of all kings. Bethlehem, a name that means the “house of bread”, can be a metaphor for the Church that brings to the world the bread of life. The Church, the Bethlehem of today, continues to be the place where the weak, the powerless and the small are welcome because in her each has a place. The gathering of these grains becomes the harvest. The united yeast becomes a powerful force. The concentrated rays become a guiding light.

In the midst of political turmoil, a growing culture of greed, and the abuse of power in this world, Christians, like others in the Middle East, suffer persecution and experience a sense of marginalisation, living in fear of violence and injustice. Yet, they are not afraid because the Shepherd walks with them, gathering them into one fold and making them a sign of his loving presence. United, they are the yeast that leavens the batch. In Christ they find a model of humility, and from him they hear a call to overcome divisions and to be united in one flock. Though they are few, in their suffering they follow in the steps of the Lamb who suffered for the world’s salvation. Though few they are sure in hope, lacking nothing.

Prayer

Good Shepherd, the fragmentation of the little flock grieves your Holy Spirit. Forgive our weak efforts and slowness in the pursuit of your will. Give us wise shepherds after your own heart who recognise the sin of division, and who will lead the churches with righteousness and holiness, to unity in you. We ask you, Lord, to hear our prayer. Amen.

DAY 5

“Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising” (Mt 2:9)

Guided by the one Lord

Readings

Ex 13:17-14:4 The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud
Ps 121 I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?
Rev 22:5-9 For the Lord God will be their light
Mt 2:7-10 Ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising

Reflection

Again and again the scriptures tell us how the Lord God walks with his people, protects them, and watches over them day and night. The path may not always be straight: sometimes we are led to retrace our steps, and at other times to return by a different route. But in all our journeying through life, we can be confident that God, who neither “sleeps nor slumbers”, protects us lest our feet slip and we fall.

Even in the greatest darkness, God’s light is with us. His light shines out through the prophets sent to guide God’s people on the way set before them and to remind them of the covenant. Most perfectly, in the fullness of time, God sends His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He is the guiding light for all nations, the glory of God in the world, the source of divine life, sealing a new covenant in his blood.

The way ahead into unity with one another, and so into closer union with Christ, is not always clear. In our earnest attempts to build unity ourselves it is all too easy to lose sight of this fundamental message of the scriptures: that God does not abandon his people even in their failures and divisiveness. Not only is this a message of hope for Christians, but for the whole world. As the story of the Magi reminds us, God guides people of all kinds, with the light of the star, to where Christ, the light of the world, is to be found.

God sends the Holy Spirit whose light enables us to see with the eyes of faith the truth of the divine Child, and the call to unity and the reconciliation of all things in Him. It is this Spirit that leads us from darkness and tragedy into Christ’s light and life.

Prayer

O Lord God our Father, you sent the star to lead the Magi to your only begotten Son. Increase our hope in you and let us know at all times that you are walking with us, watching over your people. Teach us to follow the guidance of your Holy Spirit, however strange the path may seem, so that we may be led to our unity in Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Open our eyes to your Spirit, and encourage us in our faith, so that we may confess that Jesus is Lord, and worship and rejoice in him as the Magi did in Bethlehem. We ask you these blessings in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 6

“They saw the child with Mary his mother,
and they knelt down and paid him homage” (Mt 2:11)

Gathered in worship around the One Lord

Readings

Ex 3:1-6 Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God
Ps 84 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
Rev 4:8-11 Worship the one who lives forever and ever
Mt 28:16-20 When they saw him, they worshipped him

Reflection

When the Magi from their far-away countries arrived at Bethlehem and saw the child with his mother, they worshipped him. In the presence of this revelation of God among us, eyes are cast down and knees are bent. Similarly at the sight of the burning bush, Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God. When the disciples saw the risen Christ on the mountain in Galilee, they were amazed and troubled. Yet they worshipped him. In the heavenly liturgy, the twenty-four elders fall before Him who sits on the throne. Encountering God's presence, we respond thus: gazing, followed by amazement, leading to worship.

Do we see? Are we amazed? Are we truly worshipping? How many times do we see without perceiving, our eyes remaining blind to God's presence? How can we worship in truth if we do not see first? In our narrow vision, too often we see only our tangled disagreements, forgetting that the one Lord has given his saving grace to us all, and that we share in the one Spirit who draws us into unity. Often in our pride we follow our own laws and human traditions, whilst often disregarding the love we are called to share as one people justified by Christ's blood, with a common faith in Jesus as our Saviour.

As communities enlivened by the Holy Spirit, our churches call us to walk together towards the Christ-Child to offer him homage as one people. The Spirit of compassion guides us to each other, and together guides us all to our one Lord. Only by following this guide will we be able to “worship in spirit and truth”. Our future in God is a future of unity and love; our way to this destination must reflect that same truth of one-ness in Christ.

Prayer

Compassionate God, you gave the blind the insight to recognise you as their Saviour, enable us to repent. In your mercy, remove the scales from our eyes and lead us to worship you as our God and Redeemer. In the midst of our sorrow and despite the depth of our sins, give us the capacity to love you with all our hearts. May we journey together guided by your light, with one heart and one mind, as were the very first disciples. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon us, so that together we glorify you in the Spirit's fellowship, and witness to all those around us. Amen.

DAY 7

“Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Mt 2:11)

The gifts of communion

Readings

Hos 6:1-6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice
Ps 100 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise
Acts 3:1-10 I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you
Mt 6:19-21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

Reflection

In our journey to Bethlehem, the city of bread, we contemplate the wise men who came to pay homage to the Christ-child. They opened their treasures, and offered the new-born king their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Our historical divisions, our wrong-headed fixation with rules and rituals, and our preoccupation with worldly matters, have broken us apart. So, what gifts have we prepared to offer to the king who comes to illuminate our lives and lead us to the grace of unity? We know that God does not want our riches or burnt offerings, but rather that his power works through our poverty: “I have no silver or gold”. The Lord desires our beating and loving hearts: hearts full of love for Him and for our brothers and sisters in Christ from whom we are separated; hearts flowing with acts of mercy; and hearts truly penitent and desiring change.

Let us then prepare for him the gift of a heart full of love. Kneeling in worship requires hearts that are contrite for the sin that divides us and obedient to the One we serve. This obedience revives, heals and reconciles everything that is broken or wounded in us, around us, and among us as Christians.

Christ has already given the gift of unity to his Church. We grow in communion as we share the graces our different traditions have received, acknowledging that the source of all our gifts is the Lord.

Prayer

All praise, glory and thanksgiving to you, O God. You have revealed yourself in the epiphany of your Son both to those who have long awaited your coming, and to those who were not expecting you. You know the suffering that surrounds us, the pain caused by our divisions. You see the world struggling and the deteriorating situation in the Middle East today – the place where you chose to be born, which was sanctified by your presence. We ask you to enable our hearts and our minds to know you. As we join the wise men coming from afar, we pray that you open our hearts to your love and to the love of our brothers and sisters around us. Give us the will and the means to work towards the transformation of this world and to offer each other gifts that may nurture our communion. Grant us your endless gifts and blessings. Receive our prayer in the name of your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DAY 8

“They left for their own country by another road” (Mt 2:12)

Beyond the familiar routes of separation to God's new paths

Readings

Jer 31:31-34 I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
Ps16 You show me the path of life
Eph 4:20-23 To be renewed in the spirit of your minds
Mt 11:25-30 Because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and have revealed them to infants

Reflection

We do not know what the wise men thought - they who were experts in astronomy and navigation - when they were warned to return by another road. They may well have been very confused, but the same light that illumined their journey showed them that there was another road, another possibility. They were called to change direction.

We often find ourselves bound by our familiar ways of doing things and of seeing the world. When these ways or ‘roads’ are closed, we wonder how to proceed and continue the journey. God’s divine providence is always there to show us that there is another way prepared for us. God is there to renew His covenant and lift us up from the frustration we experience when we meet an obstacle. We only have to trust that the everlasting One who gave us the light, can always find a way forward when our ways and paths are blocked. A fresh start is always possible when we are willing and open to the work of the Spirit. As churches we look to the past and find illumination, and we look to the future in search of new ways so that we can continue to shine the light of the Gospel with renewed fervour and welcome each other as Christ welcomed us for the glory of God.

On the old familiar roads Christian communities have walked apart from one another. On the new roads to which God calls us, Christians walk together and become pilgrim companions. Finding these new roads demands discernment, humility and courage. Now is the time for conversion and reconciliation.

Prayer

Gracious God, when we only know one way and we think we must return to it, and when we think that all roads are blocked, and we fall into despair, we always find you there. You are the God of renewed promises. We find you creating a new path before us, one that we did not expect. We thank you because you exceed our expectations. We thank you for your wisdom that surpasses our understanding. We thank you because your creative paths open up unforeseen possibilities. If we search our maps and find no route, nonetheless we always find you, who lead us by a yet more excellent way. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that you will always lead us back to you. Amen.

THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES*

The Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) is a fellowship of Churches which share belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Redeemer in accordance with Holy Scriptures and Church Tradition. Founded in 1974, the Council succeeded the Near East Council of Churches (founded in 1962). The Council is a regional ecumenical body, which brings together Churches for a common Christian witness in the region where Christ was born, lived, died, was buried and rose from the dead. Geographically MECC's work extends from Iran down to the Gulf in the East, to the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt in the West. It was originally formed of three Church families: the Evangelical, the Oriental Orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox. In the year 1990, the Catholic family of Churches joined the Council, adding a fourth family. Together these Churches endeavour to fulfil their common mission and realize their desired unity to the glory of the one God.

Mission

As a tangible expression of the Christian presence in the region, the Council's mission is to work towards the unity of Christians through the convergence of visions, perspectives and attitudes among the Churches of the Middle East, especially on issues related to Christian presence and witness and Christian-Muslim relations. In particular, the Council's mission is seen today as being:

- **A bridge between Churches, removing barriers and prejudice, and building a common witness to the resurrected Lord.** As an ecumenical body, MECC brings together the vast majority of Churches in the Middle East providing them with a space to gather, pray, reflect, analyse, speak with a common voice, and act and witness together.
- **A bridge between Christians and peoples of other religions in the region, especially with Muslims.** MECC reinforces and develops dialogue and partnerships with Muslims aimed at strengthening and deepening friendship and peace between peoples for the good of humanity.
- **A bridge between the Middle East and the rest of the Christian world.** MECC seeks to be a mediator between Churches in the region and their brothers and sisters in Christ elsewhere.

Ecumenical Actuality and Challenges in the Middle East

Despite complex geopolitical circumstances, and global, regional and local challenges, the Middle East Council of Churches is determined to continue to promote theological and ecumenical reflection in the Middle East. It accomplishes this mission mainly through strengthening ecumenical education, communication and networking. The Council also develops dialogue and just peace initiatives. Moreover, MECC pursues its ecumenical, humanitarian and developmental efforts by helping the most vulnerable gain access to basic needs and rights. Thanks to the trust that MECC enjoys, and which it has built up over the years, its work is supported by generous contributions from member Churches as well as by ecumenical and global partner bodies. MECC recognizes the key role played by partners in pursuing and achieving its objectives that aim at upholding human dignity and the care for God's creation.

The Middle East Council of Churches' decision to consolidate its regional ecumenical reach is paramount and it is committed to making the voice of the Churches heard in all regional and international forums. Participating alongside dialogue partners in new initiatives based on a "partnership in citizenship", it embraces diversity, and serves to strengthen the apostolic mission, witness and constructive role of Christians in the region. Such initiatives pave the way for a cross cultural exchange of perspectives and values beyond ideological and dogmatic differences.

Moreover, the churches in the Middle East are facing various challenges that affect their ecumenical life and witness, many of which have deep roots in the region's history, its religious and cultural traditions, successive economic crises and geopolitical power struggles that continue to affect the region. The first and most significant current challenge relates to the very continuation of the Christian presence in the region. Since the Palestinian Nakba in 1948 several decades-long conflicts and political turmoil in various countries of the region, such as

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Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Egypt, have led to a growing trend of Christian emigration, thereby tragically decreasing the number of the faithful and threatening the stability of the Christian presence.

Nevertheless, as well as phases of stagnation and decline, the long history of Christianity in the Middle East region has also seen phases of revival and rebirth. While some focus on the diminishing Christian presence in the Middle East, others place more emphasis on the quality of the witness and spiritual life that animates these communities. These two views are far from being mutually exclusive. They are intimately related since the Christian presence only makes sense if it is to serve a mission. The main mission of Christians in this region today lies in their ability to witness together with their partners in citizenship to the safeguarding of diversity, be it human, ecumenical or interreligious, and to building resilience in the midst of the various common challenges they are facing.

The 21st century has seen yet another turning point in the dramatic history of the Middle East. The past two decades have witnessed profound changes at all levels of society coupled with the collapse of the apparatus of government in several countries. The region has suffered continuing military conflict, weakened economic resilience and social structures, forced demographic changes, and the neglect of value systems.

Christian witness and presence in the Middle East have been profoundly impacted by these protracted crises and conflicts, and therefore it is becoming crucial that all ecumenical partners and other humanitarian and developmental bodies are able to properly comprehend the current context and consequences of the dramatic decrease in the number of Christians. Many Western interventions in the Middle East are based on a “Western Perception” of what the East needs. These interventions so far have not sufficiently taken into consideration the perspectives of the Churches and the people of the Middle East. Churches, individuals, and governments are questioning the viability of Christian witness and therefore of the very future of Christianity in the Middle East. Consequently, the Christian communities are rethinking the role of Church and its institutions. What model of “partnership in citizenship”, of diversity and coexistence with Muslims and Jews, can Christians offer to the region and to a globalized world? And finally, what is the prophetic role of the Middle East Council of Churches for a renewed, just, peaceful and sustainable Middle East?

Facing the Challenges

In order to face these challenges, the MECC is setting different models for its work as follows:

1. Striving to accomplish an ecclesial and theological renewal that would transform its common ministry by stressing the vital role of youth, disadvantaged by social injustice as well as by pervading violence. The difficulties faced by young people are exacerbated by the internet and social media, which entice them to question the future of their life in the region
2. Expanding already existing models of coexistence, hospitality and religious diversity in the face of a widespread polarization of loyalties. In this respect the MECC strives to respond to the desperate plight of refugees in the region and to meet the needs of migrants, such as the many domestic workers. MECC also works for the restoration of a just and viable peace for all. It is particularly concerned about the absence of a durable and just solution for Palestinian refugees, the continued slow but steady expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem and the West Bank, and the continued marginalization of, and discrimination against, Palestinians in other countries around the region. This unjust treatment demeans the dignity, rights and opportunities for a population traumatized by years of displacement. MECC’s Department for Services for Palestinian refugees (DSPR) is therefore as pertinent as ever.

Encouraged as it is by the determination of most Heads of Churches to preserve MECC as a body despite all the existing challenges it faces, and sustained by the expressed feeling and support of Christian theologians, Churches and community leaders in the region in its efforts to promote synergy and cohesion between Christians, MECC continues to work and pray that the Light of Christ should shine ever more brightly in the East.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Themes 1968-2022

*Materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission
and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used in 1968*

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3:9)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich,
Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971 ...and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13)
(Preparatory meeting in Bari, Italy)
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:1-13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975 God's purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)
(Material from an Australian group – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1976 We shall be like him (1 John 3:2) or, Called to become what we are
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches.
Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war.
Preparatory meeting held in Geneva)
- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4:7-11)
(Material from Argentina – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic – Preparatory meeting held
in Milan)
- 1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12:3b-13)
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)
(Material from Kenya – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the life of the world (1 John 1:1-4)
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Céligny (Bossey),
Switzerland)
- 1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)

- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)
(Material from Jamaica – Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)
(Material from Yugoslavia (Slovenia) – Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)
(Material from England – Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)
(Material from Italy – Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12:5-6a)
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)
(Material from Spain – Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13)
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1992 I am with you always... Go, therefore (Matthew 28:16-20)
(Material from Belgium – Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)
- 1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5:22-23)
(Material from Zaire – Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)
- 1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4:23-37)
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17)
(Material from Faith and Order – Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22)
(Material from Portugal – Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God
(2 Corinthians 5:20)
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council – Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:14-27)
(Material from France – Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples
(Revelation 21:1-7)
(Material from Malaysia – Preparatory meeting held in Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches – Preparatory meeting held La Verna, Italy)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)
(Material from Romania – Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9)
(Material CEEC and CEC – Preparatory meeting near Augsburg, Germany)
- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18)
(Material churches in Argentina – Preparatory meeting at Los Rubios, Spain)
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27)
(Material from Aleppo, Syria – Preparatory meeting in Palermo, Sicily)
- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)
(Material from Slovakia – Preparatory meeting in Piestaň, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them
(Matthew 18:18-20)
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)

- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37)
(Material from South Africa – Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:(12a) 13b-18)
(Material from USA – Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)
(Material from Korea – Preparatory meeting held in Marseille, France)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)
(Material from Scotland – Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011 One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42)
(Material from Jerusalem – Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)
- 2012 We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ
(cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)
(Material from Poland – Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6:6-8)
(Material from India – Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)
- 2014 Has Christ been divided? (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)
- 2015 Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4:7)
(Material from Brazil – Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2016 Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)
(Material from Latvia – Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)
- 2017 Reconciliation - The love of Christ compels us (2 Cor 5:14-20)
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Wittenberg, Germany)
- 2018 Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)
(Material from the Caribbean – Preparatory meeting held in Nassau, Bahamas)
- 2019 Justice and only justice you shall pursue (Deut 16:18-20)
(Material from Indonesia – Preparatory meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia)
- 2020 They showed us unusual kindness (Acts 28:2)
(Material from Malta – Preparatory meeting held in Rabat, Malta)
- 2021 Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit (cf. John 15:5-9)
(Material from Community of Grandchamp – Preparatory meeting held at Areuse, Switzerland)
- 2022 We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him (Mt 2:2)
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches, Lebanon – Preparatory meeting held online)

KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

- c. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.
- 1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a “Union of Prayer for Unity”.
- 1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.
- 1908 First observance of the “Church Unity Octave” initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing “Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity”.
- 1935 Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” on the inclusive basis of prayer for “the unity Christ wills by the means he wills”.
- 1958 Unité Chrétienne (Lyon, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus’ prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17).
- 1964 The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.
- 1966 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.
- 1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.
- 1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.
- 1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, which links the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from YMCA and YWCA.
- 2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be jointly published and produced in the same format by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).
- 2008 Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).
- 2017 Marking the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the materials for the Week of Prayer in 2017 were prepared by Christians in Germany.