2nd January 2022

**Call to worship**

Arise, shine for your light has come!
As the magi followed the star to a new place,
a place where dreams became reality,
let us follow our Lord and saviour
to a place of renewed hope.
Not looking back, but always moving forward,
let us seek and find the king.



**A gathering prayer**

Lord Jesus,
we gather at the start of a new year,
we gather to worship you.
May you journey with us always,
especially through the dark and uncomfortable places,
and into places filled with hope and new possibilities,
into a place of light and love.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

Almighty God, king of creation,
You are our Day Star in the murk of a winter’s morn,
and our guiding light at all times.
We set our faltering feet upon the path of the New Year,
raising our eyes in faith to the light of your love;
lead us onwards with hope and strength.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

God the Father, who calls us to set forth:
**We worship and adore you.**
Christ the Son who journeys with us:
**We worship and adore you.**
Holy Spirit who inspires us for the road ahead:
**We worship and adore you.**
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, we are dwellers in darkness,
and often content to stay there.
We confess that we are not always seekers after signs,
nor do we actively pursue your guiding light.
We fail to raise our eyes from the murk of our existence
to the intimations of the miraculous in which your world abounds.
Forgive us for dwelling on the darkness of our lives;
we lift our gaze to you, O Lord.
Let your star blaze anew in our vision,
that we may follow where you lead,
our hope rekindled, our strength renewed.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

The festive lights are dimming and the shadows encroach again;
we have kept them at bay with cheer, good company and food.
But now they creep back,
accusing us of all the darkness we have denied awhile.
In the weak light of morning, in the dim days stretching ahead,
we feel bad about ourselves,
diminished by despair at our shortcomings –
our lethargy, our fears, our failure to live as we should.
Yet you, Father, blaze into our darkness and dazzle us with hope.
You, Son, reach out your hand and raise us up.
And you, Holy Spirit, bind us in this active forgiveness
that encourages, and inspires, and urges us onwards.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

By a heavenly sign you called them, those seekers
who crossed sands and rivers and rocky places to find you.
We praise you for the example of their perseverance
in their pilgrimage to prove the truth of their observations.
So, Lord, we thank you for calling us to the pilgrimage
of this New Year; for the journey we must make through it,
no turning back, and for the inner journeys into our faith
and spirituality and the epiphanies they will bring.
We set forth in faith.
**Amen.**



**Matthew 2.1-12**

The reading for this Sunday recalls the visit of the Magi to the newborn Christ child. We well know the story of how they were guided by a star and bumped into King Herod. Herod would then get anxious about the birth of a rival and set in motion the massacre of the innocents, killing all the newborn sons.

The Magi are also known as the wise men. We are assuming that they were men. The scriptures don’t tell us.

What makes you wise?

This week the world has mourned the passing of Desmond Tutu. He was described by Barack Obama as the moral compass of South Africa. "Archbishop Tutu was grounded in the struggle for liberation and justice in his own country, but also concerned with injustice everywhere."

"He never lost his impish sense of humour and willingness to find humanity in his adversaries.

Growing up in the 1980s and training to be a minister in the 1990s the struggle against apartheid and the courage and leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu was inspirational to me as a young Christian looking for examples of Christian leaders.

I never had the privilege of meeting him in person, but I did meet his mentor, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, who came to preach at my ministerial training college, and I got to sit next to him during dinner.

Huddleston was the reason Tutu became an Anglican priest. In the days of apartheid when a black person met a white person on the pavement, the black person was expected to step off the pavement into the gutter to allow the white person to pass giving the white person this gesture of respect. One day when Tutu was just a boy he was walking with his mother down the street when Huddleston came toward them. He was a tall white man dressed in a black suit. Before Tutus mother and he could step off the pavement as was expected of them, Huddleston stepped off the pavement and as Tutus mother and he walked past, he tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to her.

Tutu said he was more than surprised at what had happened and asked his mother ‘why did that white man do that?’ His mother explained, ‘He’s an Anglican priest. He’s a man of God, that’s why he did it.’

When she told me that he was an Anglican priest; said Tutu, ‘I decided there and then that I would be an Anglican priest to. And what is more, I wanted to be a man of God’.

A man of God he became. Tutu woke at 4 am every morning, before engaging in an early morning walk, prayers, and the Eucharist.[[429]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay1988133,_141Allen2006274-429) On Fridays, he fasted until supper.[[430]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAllen2006275-430)

Tutu was a committed Christian from boyhood.[[431]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGish200423-431) Prayer was a big part of his life; he often spent an hour in prayer at the start of each day, and would ensure that every meeting or interview that he was part of was preceded by a short prayer. He read the Bible every day[[4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-edition.cnn.com-433).[[432]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay1988141-432) He was even known to often pray while driving.[[432]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay1988141-432) most memorably on having been release after having been kidnapped whilst Bishop of Lesotho. Driving away from his kidnappers he was overcome with God’s deliverance and started praying at the wheel of the moving car. His passenger, who had also been released leaned over to grab the wheel to stop the car veering off the road and making God’s deliverance turn into Tutu’s accident!

It is well chronicled his role in bringing an end to apartheid in South Africa and his work alongside Nelson Mandela to lead that country’s healing.

He was not afraid to speak out against injustice.

One of his famous sayings was:

[*If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/298487)

[*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/916110)

He became the Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986

In an interview with Christianity today in 1992 Tutu, by then a Nobel Peace Prize winner, was asked how the Christian faith had led him to fight against apartheid.

Using trinitarian language Tutu defended the struggle against oppression and injustice by declaring that the intrinsic value of every person derives from being created in the image of God and from being redeemed by Christ. Then he concluded, ‘as if that were not enough, God says, ‘I will sanctify you by the gift of my Holy Spirit’, so human beings are of worth not only because they have been created in the image of God and are offered redemption by the precious blood of our Saviour, but also because they may become tabernacles of the Holy Spirit’

He had earlier said that ‘When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land’.

He was well aware of how the Bible could be used and abused to exploit and oppress people and cautioned reading it with great discernment. He recommended that people read it as a collection of books, not a single constitutional document: "You have to understand that the Bible is really a library of books and it has different categories of material", he said. "There are certain parts which you have to say no to. The Bible accepted slavery. St Paul said women should not speak in church at all and there are people who have used that to say women should not be ordained. There are many things that you shouldn't accept." He famously said that if God was homophobic, he shouldn’t be worshipped. [[43](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-edition.cnn.com-433)

Tutu said on his appointment as archbishop "I really would get mad with God. I would say, 'I mean, how in the name of everything that is good can you allow this or that to happen?' ". "But I didn't doubt that ultimately good, right, justice would prevail."

As the government became increasingly oppressive -- detaining Black people, establishing onerous laws -- Tutu became increasingly outspoken.

"He was one of the most hated people, particularly by White South Africa, because of the stance he took," former Truth and Reconciliation Commission member Alex Boraine said.

Chikane, the South African Council of Churches colleague, "His moral authority (was) both his weapon and his shield, enabling him to confront his oppressors with a rare impunity."

Tutu's politics spring directly and inevitably from his Christianity."[[455]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay1988164-455) He believed that it was the duty of Christians to oppose unjust laws,[[140]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGish200475-140) and that there could be no separation between the religious and the political just as—there is no separation between the spiritual realm (the Holy Ghost) and the material one (Jesus Christ).[[456]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay198887-456) However, he was adamant that he was not personally a politician.[[455]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDu_Boulay1988164-455) He felt that religious leaders like himself should stay outside of party politics, He tried to avoid alignment with any particular political party; But he would speak out if he felt he had to.

Tutu said ‘My father always used to say, "Don't raise your voice. Improve your argument."

In 1988, two years after being named Archbishop of Cape Town, becoming the first Black man to head the Anglican Church in South Africa, Tutu [was arrested](http://www.timelines.ws/countries/SOUTHAFRICA.HTML) while taking an anti-apartheid petition to South Africa's parliament.

But the tide was turning. The next year, Tutu led a 20,000-person march in Cape Town. Also in 1989, a new president, F.W. de Klerk, started easing apartheid laws. Finally, on February 11, 1990, Mandela was released from prison after 27 years. De Klerk died [last month.](https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/11/africa/fw-de-klerk-death-intl/index.html)

In 1995 Mandela appointed him chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the human rights violations of the apartheid years. Tutu broke down at the TRC's first hearing in 1996.

He sobbed out loud at many of the hearings as he heard stories from whites and blacks about evil things done during the time of apartheid by all sides.

When chairing the TRC, Tutu advocated an explicitly Christian model of reconciliation, as part of which he believed that South Africans had to face up to the damages that they had caused and accept the consequences of their actions.[[475]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAllen2006342-475) As part of this, he believed that the perpetrators and beneficiaries of apartheid must admit to their actions but that the system's victims should respond generously, stating that it was a "gospel imperative" to forgive.[[475]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAllen2006342-475) At the same time, he argued that those responsible had to display true repentance in the form of restitution.[[475]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAllen2006342-475)

This is what he believed about forgiveness:

*Forgiving is not forgetting; it’s actually remembering--remembering and not using your right to hit back. Its a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don’t want to repeat what happened.*

This is what he said about the importance of talking to the people you don’t get on with:

[*If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/298492)

And these were some of his views on the goodness of humanity and the importance of accepting difference and diversity:

*We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family.*

*Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.*

*I can't control what happens to me, but I can control how I respond to it*

*Our maturity will be judged by how well we are able to agree to disagree and yet continue to love one another, to care for one another, and cherish one another and seek the greater good of the other*

*Frequently people think compassion and love are merely sentimental. No! They are very demanding. If you are going to be compassionate, be prepared for action.*

*Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.*

*It is through weakness and vulnerability that most of us learn empathy and compassion and discover our soul.*

There was a story of when Terry Waite the envoy of the archbishop of Canterbury arrived in South Africa and during the apartheid years. He was met by Bishop Desmond Tutu. Following a greeting, the courteous African grabbed the two bags and started off with them. Whereupon Waite said, ‘Come on Bishop, I can manage them myself’. Flashing his trademark mischievous smile Tutu replied, ‘But it’s the black man’s burden Terry’.

They laughed together

Then each man walked away with one suitcase each.

Tutu had a humility that he didn’t’ believe he was a good man and was all too aware of his failings. He said:

*We may be surprised at who we see in heaven. God has a soft spot for sinners. His standards are quote low.*

Despite all the praise and fame, however, he did not feel like a "great man."

"What is a great man?" he said. "I just know that I've had incredible, incredible opportunities. ... When you stand out in a crowd, it is always only because you are being carried on the shoulders of others."

For all of his good works, he added, there may have been another reason he had so many followers.

"They took me only because I have this large nose," he said. "And I have this easy name, Tutu."

His deep belief and trust in the victory of Christ over evil gave him a hope that never faded.

He said [*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.*](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/298498)

I remember Joh Bell telling me that Tutu was one of the most inspirational people he had ever met. He said Tutu would often receive many death threats. People would ring up and speak obscenities and abuse to him over the phone. He would always be polite and gracious back and say ‘My friend God loves us all and God will win the victory. Whether you kill me or not, victory is ours through him who loved us. Why don’t you join the winning side?’

Tutu wrote a famous prayer in his African Prayer Book

VICTORY IS OURS Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate; Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death; Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

John Bell worked with Tutu in 1995 to set this prayer to music.

We thank God for this man and his inspiration and work for God’s justice and peace.

**Prayers of intercession**

Dear loving God, we remember the wise men and their gifts.
As we think of **gold**, we thank you
for all that we have, for our possessions,
for the money in bank accounts and in our purses and wallets;
and we pray
for those who have gone into debt in order to celebrate Christmas,
for those whose income is insecure as a result of the Covid pandemic,
and for those who cant afford adequately to heat their homes.
Lord of light:
**Bring hope into the darkness.**

Dear loving God, we remember the wise men and their gifts.
As we think of **frankincense**, we thank you
for our church and for all places of worship,
for those who help us find peace in our hearts,
for those who enable us to know your holiness;
and we pray
for our churches and the churches of our community
that they may build upon all their advent and Christmas mission activities,
for retreat houses and special places of peace,
and all who speak words of holiness into our society.
Lord of light:
**Bring hope into the darkness.**

Dear loving God, we remember the wise men and their gifts.
As we think of **myrrh**, we thank you
for the death and resurrection of Jesus,
for those who care for the dying and the bereaved,
for those who offer counselling and support;
and we pray
for those who grieve lost time and lost opportunities,
for those who are suffering from Covid,
and for all who mourn loved ones at this time.
Lord of light:
**Bring hope into the darkness.**

May the wisdom of the wise men inspire us to continue to seek your light and love, and to offer you our gifts and resources that you may use us to build your kingdom.
In Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**



I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessèd God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

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**A prayer for all ages together**

*Use this prayer while walking/processing around the building with a young child carrying the brightly lit star.*

God of journeys,
as the wise men followed the star:
**We will follow too.**
As the wise men kept going on their journey:
**We will keep on going too.**
As the wise men saw the light in the dark:
**We will look for your light too.**
As the wise men found Jesus:
**We have found Jesus too.**
As the wise men followed the star:
**We will follow Jesus.**
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

God of hope, Jesus our companion, Holy Spirit our strength,
travel with us as we journey onwards
into paths known and unknown, familiar and unfamiliar,
through times of darkness and into your marvellous light,
always knowing that you are by our side.
**Amen.**

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