

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2022

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

(Mt 2:2)



INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL
MOVEMENT—KENYA CHAPTER

FOREWORD

Word from Chairperson, International Ecumenical Movement-Kenya Chapter

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, during this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we are invited to pray in communion with our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East. They were commissioned by the World Council of Churches and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity to prepare the material for 2022. They chose the symbol of **the Star in the East** that led the Magi to the newly born King, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (Mt 2: 1-12).

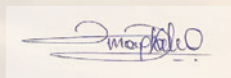
Pope Francis's Encyclical Fratelli Tutti speaks of a great cloud of darkness that covers the world. Jesus comes to us as the light that shines through the darkness of our world. Since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, we have seen how humanity can be so selfish. We have experienced the gap between the rich nations and poor nations get wider. The self-interest of powerful nations and corruption have deprived many of the needed vaccines to protect lives. Equally, there is a lack of solidarity in effectively addressing some of the critical issues that are affecting our world today, in particular the issue of peace in the Middle East. Thousands of people have been thrown on the road as refugees and as migrants fleeing the insecurity in these regions. Thousands of Christians have fled the region for fear of persecution.

The Magi from the East are a symbol of unity of all nations as desired by God. The star in the sky is a symbol of hope. We too, like the Magi, are called to follow the star of hope that brings humanity to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. This is a common mission that our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to His Church. As we gather to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we are invited to pray in communion with our brothers and sisters from the East who have endured so much suffering for lack of peace. As we read in Isaiah 62:1 'For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.'

The meditation for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity invites all of us, in unison, to rise up and stand for the dignity of each and every person and respect for human rights and freedom of worship all over the world. More than ever, it is time to show our unity in Christ as we strive together to be the light that shines in the deepest darkness of our world today. Let us commit ourselves to truth and justice, peace and reconciliation of all the children of God scattered throughout the world.

The week of prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated from January 18 to 25. There are others who celebrate this week around the feast of Pentecost. But the theme is meant

to guide us throughout the year. This is, once again, a golden opportunity given to us to show that the Church of Christ is One and that together, we are invited to shine and witness to the world that Jesus is the King of Peace.



Fr Maganya H, Innocent, M.Afr

Chair, International Ecumenical Movement

Kenya Chapter (IEM-K)

Introduction

(Suggestion: To be read by several attendees, five in all)

1

The international group appointed jointly by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) of the Roman Catholic Church and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to prepare the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WOPCU) 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 have seen his star in the East and have come to pay homage to 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 in mind the human and material consequences of the devastating explosion that rend 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.

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 splendor 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.

2

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 faraway 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).

3

But the history of the Middle East was, and still is, characterised 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 lacking in 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.

4

For this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 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 the innocents.

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 gentle king, of 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.

5

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, of Herod's evil intentions. 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 the marginalised. It requires from the churches transparency and accountability in dealing with the world, and with each other. This means churches need to cooperate to provide relief to the afflicted, to welcome the displaced, to relieve the burdened, and to build a just and honest society. This is a call for churches to work together so that young people can build a 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).

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 marginalised, 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

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.*

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. The 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

Holy God!

Holy Mighty!

Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Psalm 8 (responsively)

R. O Lord, our Sovereign Lord, 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

First Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

Chant

Song of Light

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.

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 /an e-animation for this Liturgical symbol.

- 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 childhood of the Lord was 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 marginalised. 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 were filled 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 which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, forever and ever. Amen*

Hymn

Sending and Blessing (All ordained clergy are invited to the front to take part in this section)

- 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

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.

Prayer for all Churches and Ministries

Each day, we will pray for the conversion to Christ for a specific Church, believing that getting closer to Christ by a genuine daily effort to imitate Him, we will get closer to one another as disciples of the Gospel.

Let us pray for the Orthodox Churches

Today we pray for the Holy Orthodox Churches, for the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul, Bartholomeo, for the Patriarch of Moscow, Kyrill, for the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Coptic Patriarch of Cairo, those of Antioch and the other Churches and all their faithful. We pray that they all be faithful to the Gospel of Christ and fulfil the meaning of the name orthodox; that they come closer to Him in their daily lives so as to impact their nations with righteousness. We pray in particular for the Church members in the Middle East who are migrating in great numbers because of war or persecution; and for many more who stay behind to bear witness, may the Lord have mercy on them all including their enemies and show them His love and protection. May God bring peace especially to the Middle East for all to accept the Prince of Peace.

More prayers may follow

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. Theirs 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.

Let us pray for the Anglican Communion

This Church continues to experience tremendous turmoil because of issues dividing the various parts of the Church around the world mostly related to issues of biblical authority, ordination of women, same-sex unions, and ordination to ministry and leadership of self-confessed gay priests or ministers. Let us pray for the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is the Primate of the Anglican Communion, for all the bishops, priests and faithful: for their continual conversion to Christ and their service to the poor and needy. We pray in particular for the Anglican Church in Kenya and her

Archbishop the Most Reverend Dr. Jackson Ole Sapit, that he may, with fellow bishops, keep the flock in unity and peace. Amen.

More prayers may follow

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 dehumanises 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.

Let us pray for the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK)

On October 31st, 2017, Lutherans worldwide marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the day when Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk and biblical professor at the University of Wittenberg, nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in the city of Wittenberg. Since this was the church in which the academic community worshipped, and this door was normally used for academic and church announcements, Luther pinned his 95 theses on it to provoke a public debate at the university in the quest for the reform of the Catholic Church due to his concern over the sale of indulgences. As a biblical scholar, Luther was convinced that humans are saved by grace through faith alone according to the scriptures. He vigorously objected to the corrupt practice of selling indulgences as a way of gaining salvation and, on October 31, 1517, he nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. This disputation never took place as some members of the church took the folio down, printed more copies and circulated the document among friends and in churches, thus sparking the flame of the reformation that changed the church and the world. The church became divided and fragmented in the aftermath, and Europe was in great religious and political turmoil for many centuries until only recently when ecumenical contact and cooperation has become possible. We rejoice that Lutherans and Roman Catholics came together on 31 October 2016 at the Lutheran Cathedral in Lund, Sweden, when the Pope and Lutheran bishops from around the world jointly celebrated Holy Communion to mark the year leading to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This ecumenical event opened the window for the reconciliation of Christians throughout the Church of Christ. Furthermore, in 1999 the two churches signed the Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on Justification. This declaration was later adopted by the Reformed Church in 2017. This has now enabled Catholics and Protestants to come to a common understanding on the doctrine of justification, which was the key point of contention in the Reformation of 1517. This, in addition to the century-old Protestant ecumenism

through the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), marks a great milestone towards reconciliation and unity. May the Church continue to ever be reformed and reforming through the grace of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) and the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), for their respective Presiding Bishops that they may be granted wisdom in leading their flock in the ways of righteousness to the glory of Your Holy Name. Amen

More prayers may follow

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.

Let us pray for the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Churches

Many Protestant Churches have been committed to the ecumenical spirit from the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement and the creation of the WCC. Many of their leaders had a great vision to see the Church of Christ re-united for the purpose of true evangelism, particularly in mission countries. May the testimony of their devoted lives inspire more Christians to put in practice the Gospel values, especially where God is less known. Assist the current generation not to flag in zeal, but rather to rekindle that interest that together we may walk towards that unity that Christ prayed for.

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 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, He is the guiding light for all nations, the glory of God in the world, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

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.

Let us pray for all Evangelicals and Pentecostal Churches

Many depressed areas in Kenya have Evangelical chapels where the Sunday Service is a moment of intense worship and praises to the Lord. Poor people express their faith in traditional songs and intercessions. Christ is alive in their lives and is hope for a

better future out of misery. Let us rejoice that they celebrate the Gospel joyfully and wholeheartedly. We pray for their pastors that they may bring to their congregations a ray of light and peace. May the Lord bless their families and provide opportunities for all. Let us pray that guided by God's Word, which is truth, they will not be misled by false visions and prophecies.

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.

Let us pray for the Roman Catholic Church around the world

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has shown a desire to reform the Church and bring her closer to the Gospel of Christ. Three key words come to our mind in reference to his ministry: simplicity, joy and mercy. May all the members of the Roman Catholic Church walk along this line of action and come closer to Christ. Let them accept the invitation of Pope Francis to boldly go to the margins of society and announce the Good News of salvation. We pray for the leaders of the Church that they may inspire deep conversion and work for unity, fraternal love, and service to the needy.

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 timely traditions, 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.

Let us pray for Christians involved in Ecumenical Groups

The theologians of all Churches have done a great job in the last 50 years in putting to the fore all that unite the Christians coming from various denominations. Now, it is time for the faithful to commit themselves to a greater sense of unity in love, praying together, acting together for the service of the needy, and working together for the protection of creation. We ask the Lord to inspire them with genuine initiatives that will give hands to their faith and that reconciliation among them will spring out from their desire to serve Christ in neighbour and society.

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.

Ps 16 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, the way of love. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that You will always lead us back to You. Amen.

Let us pray for Christians who have left the Church and for the non-believers

In many public places in today's society, God is not acknowledged anymore. People have come to live without reference to God. Many have grown individualistic, self-centred, and even cynical about politics, wars, poverty and religious matters. Yet, some individuals have seen the necessity of human solidarity, consciousness about climate change, the flow of migrants and economic disparity to be concerned about them. Always God looks at the heart of people. May those who put efforts in responding to the challenges of this world come to realise that only in Jesus is their work fulfilled and may they find a deep sense of serving and bring light and peace around them in Him and by seeing the connection between their work and faith to the glory of God.

INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT-KENYA CHAPTER (IEM-K)

This booklet has been compiled by the International Ecumenical Movement-Kenya Chapter (IEM-K) from the materials that came from the Committee mandated jointly by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity PCPCU) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The IEM-K is a voluntary member organisation at the service of ecumenism at the grassroots in Kenya. Its members hold monthly fellowship meetings on the first Saturday of every month, two Round Table meetings in a year to discuss topical and emerging issues, and a National Ecumenical Conference every three years).

The IEM-K partners with churches, organisations, and institutions committed to ecumenism in planning and execution of ecumenical endeavours in our context. It is always willing and ready to assist any church, organisation and institution with ecumenical education and development.



CONTACT:

Email: info@iemkenya.org

<http://www.iemkenya.org/>