



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

Epiphany 2026

Arise Shine a Light Has come!

4 January 2026

Readings

Isaiah 60

Matthew 2

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Today, on Epiphany Sunday, the church celebrates God's great unveiling—His light breaking into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. The story of the Magi and the prophetic vision from Isaiah invite us to see not only what God has revealed, but also who God is calling us to become because of that revelation.

It is a day when the church lifts its eyes to the horizon and beholds the glory of God rising over the world. It is a day of illumination - of seeing what was previously hidden, and of discovering that God's purposes are far grander, wider, and more beautiful than we imagined.

Our reading from Isaiah 60 begins with an urgent, hopeful command: *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you."* Isaiah spoke these words to a people discouraged, uncertain, and overwhelmed by the realities of exile and rebuilding. Their world felt dim. Their future felt fragile.

Isaiah doesn't deny the darkness—he names it clearly: *"Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples."* But he also proclaims a truth more powerful than any gloom: the Lord Himself rises upon His people. God's presence is not an escape from reality but a transformation of it.

Isaiah imagines nations and kings drawn to this divine light. The world comes, not because Israel is strong or impressive, but because God is shining through them. What a picture for Epiphany: a world stumbling in confusion suddenly seeing hope, direction, and truth in the radiance of God's coming.

This prophetic vision becomes real in the Gospel story of the Magi—men from foreign lands drawn by a mysterious light to the presence of Christ. They recognized that something world-changing had occurred, even if they didn't fully understand it.

They are outsiders, yet they are among the first to bow before the newborn King. Isaiah's prophecy unfolds in front of us: *"Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."* These travellers embody Isaiah's vision—they come not because Israel is powerful, but because God is drawing them.

And their journey teaches us something important: God's revelation sparks movement. The light of Epiphany is not something we simply admire - it is something we follow. It calls us forward, sometimes in unexpected directions - often into the uncertain or the unknown.

But the story also gives us Herod - a man who hears the same news but responds very differently. Not with hope and expectation but with fear.

The light of Christ reveals not only God's glory but the truth of our own hearts. In the gospel narrative we see this wrestling between the hopeful authentic searching of the magi and the fear of Herod that his own sphere of power and authority might be challenged. That tantalising detail in v7 as Herod 'secretly' engages with the wise men, pointing to the darkness of Herod's heart that will shortly unfold in unspeakable acts of evil.

Tom Wright describes Epiphany as the moment when the world is invited to see "God's new creation beginning to happen." In Jesus, Wright says, God is not offering us a private spiritual upgrade but launching His long-promised rescue operation for the whole cosmos. Christ's appearing is not merely comforting; it is revolutionary. It announces that God's kingdom has broken into the world, and that nothing - including us - can remain the same.

And so the visit of the Magi reveals that the birth of Jesus reorders reality. The old power structures tremble, for the true King has arrived. The old boundaries between insider and outsider blur, for the

Gentiles come to worship the Jewish Messiah. The vision of God's mission widens: that God intends to set the whole world right, beginning in Christ and continuing through His people. And all this in the vulnerability of a baby, born into the margins in the darkness of night. Emmanuel, God with us.

Epiphany, then, is not only about seeing the light - it is about stepping into its transforming power. Revelation is followed by vocation.

Because God's light has come, something is required of us. In Christ, God has revealed not only who *He* is but who we are meant to be. We become bearers of His light.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, *"I was not born to be free. I was born to adore and obey."*

I wonder if this is the Epiphany posture. To encounter Christ is not merely to admire Him but to adore and obey - like the Magi, we are called to worship. Like the Magi, we are called to offer what is most precious. Like the Magi, we are called to go home "by another way" - changed by the encounter.

As we stand at the beginning of 2026, Isaiah's words feel as timely as ever. Darkness still covers the earth—conflict, division, anxiety, mistrust. Many feel adrift. Yet Epiphany once again freshly declares into the world of today that the true light has come and that the darkness does not get the final word.

We are called afresh to be people of light and of life:

- To carry the light of Christ into places of darkness and despair.
- To embody hope where cynicism reigns.
- To offer reconciliation in a fractured world.
- To show compassion that reflects the true heart of the God who drew the Magi from afar.
- And yes, to speak truth and mercy and justice into the corridors of power.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come."

This is the heartbeat of Epiphany.

The light has dawned—not abstract, not distant, but embodied in Jesus Christ.

May we, like the Magi, seek Him.

May we, like Isaiah's people, reflect Him.

May we, as children of the living God, walk into this new year as bearers of the light that reveals, heals, and transforms.

Amen.