

Encouraging YOU to know JESUS

Walk in the light, walk in the light of the Lord

Please note that our Interim Moderator and Locum, Rev. Rona Young, will be visiting those with pastoral needs by telephone during the Covid-19 pandemic. If in need of pastoral care, please contact Rona by telephone on (01292) 471982.

Welcome and Intimations

Good morning and a very happy New Year to everyone watching this online service from Newton Wallacetown Church. I am sure that you are all so glad that 2020 is over and, although there are difficult days ahead, at least knowing that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine has been approved, means there is light at the end of a long dark tunnel.

I am sure you all know that, because we are back in Level 4, there will only be an online service next Sunday 10th January, and by that time, we may know if there are to be any changes. The Extraordinary Times will be available at 12 noon and we begin our prayer time at 12.30 pm, starting with the Lord's Prayer and continuing with your own personal prayers.

Many of you will have read in last week's Extraordinary Times that sadly Anne McDonald passed away on Christmas Day. We will be remembering her family in our prayers later in the service, but Jane, her daughter in Canada, has said by email that she wishes to thank everyone at Newton Wallacetown Church for all the kindness shown to her mother. She says that her mother often told her how much she appreciated all the help from the church.

Call to Worship from Psalm 105:

"Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his greatness.

Tell the nations of what he has done.

Sing praise to the Lord"

Hymn: *"Lord for the years, your love has kept and guided"*

Prayer

Let us pray,

Everlasting Father,

once again this morning, we celebrate your coming in Jesus Christ, and that his light continues to shine in the darkness of our world today.

We praise you for the light that has shone in so many lives since then, and the faith that you have nurtured in so many hearts. Over the years, you have brought us to new beginnings, new purpose and new life.

We praise you for the assurance that evil will be overcome, that hope will replace despair, joy will come after sorrow, and life triumphant over death.

O God our Heavenly Father,
always help us to remember that, from the beginning, the Good News of Jesus' birth was not just for a few, but for everyone.

You made it known to the shepherds, tending their flocks by night, unlikely representatives, because of their work.

You also made it known to the Magi from the East who lived so far away, with no knowledge of you as they were Gentiles, and so, we know that no one is outside your love.

Loving Father,
you guided the Magi to Bethlehem, giving them light for their journey and they responded in faith. Forgive us Lord that, too often, we fall short of their example.

You guided them by a star. Forgive us that so often, we do not follow your guidance, when we are more concerned about our own way than yours, and we are reluctant to commit ourselves to anything when the way ahead is not clear.

Lord God,
forgive our foolishness, our stubbornness and our weaknesses in which we fail you day after day. Forgive our lack of faith and our closed minds.

Lord, have mercy upon us and forgive all our sins.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Children's Talk Epiphany

I wonder if you have made any New Year resolutions? If we were not in lockdown, I wonder if you have any special traditions at midnight on Hogmanay?

In the past, people in Scotland used to go first-footing. If possible, a tall dark handsome man was to be the first to enter a house, carrying a piece of coal, and perhaps shortbread or a black bun – and of course, a bottle of whisky!

I have been finding out about traditions in some other parts of the world when life was normal!
Netherlands – they burn old Christmas trees to purge the old year and light fireworks welcome the new. To purge means to get rid of something you do not want.

South Africa - the people throw old furniture out of the window.

Romania – the people put on bear costumes to ward off evil

Spain – the revellers – the people celebrating - try to stuff 12 grapes into their mouths – one for each chime in the count-down to midnight.

Austria – the bells of St. Stephen's Cathedral are rung, followed by the tune of the Blue Danube, and the people dance in the streets.

Siberia – they break the ice in a lake and a diver takes a tree to plant underwater.

Scotland – except for this year, there are fireworks at Edinburgh Castle and in many, many cities throughout the world. The famous bridge in Sydney in Australia is always shown on our television screens with wonderful fireworks, many hours before we celebrate New Year here.

I know that, in the **Midwest of America**, they have a very interesting New Year's tradition: If you are brave enough and feel you are fit enough to do it, at midnight you go outside and run around the house **barefoot in the snow!**

I am sure we can all imagine children doing that and yelling because their feet were freezing! As soon as they went back indoors, they would dry off their feet on towels, and heat them at the fire or a radiator and perhaps have some hot chocolate.

Running barefoot through the snow, was a way to meet the New Year: to challenge yourself to meet hardship with courage, exuberance and even laughter.

(I wonder if there are any children watching, if they think they could do it?)

The children were told that they were not to stay out too long, or they might get frostbite. On the other hand, you could just stay in, warm and snug beside the fire, and not face any challenge.

I am sure that those who dare to go out in the snow would hesitate to do so, if there was not a warm house, with slippers and a warm fire waiting for them. The thought of coming back to the warmth probably gives them courage to go on.

This year we are all having to face life in the middle of the second wave of the pandemic, where the number of people with the virus keeps growing.

I said we have never known a Christmas like the one just past, and now we have never begun a New Year like the beginning of 2021.

If we had to face running round the house barefoot in the snow, we would just have to grit our teeth and go on. Even if we are not fit enough to thinking of running through the snow, I know we can all imagine it.

We all have our faith, and we know that Jesus is with us, even when we feel very alone. And when we have completed any difficult task, we know that Jesus will be pleased that we have done it, or come through it.

There are very difficult months ahead, when we do not know for how long we will have to stay in Level 4. There is the wonderful news of the second vaccine, but during these long, dark, dismal days – **Jesus is with us** – he will strengthen us inwardly and give us the courage to go on every step of the way on 2021.

Amen.

Hymn: *“One more step along the world I go”*

Bible reading: **Matthew 2: 1 – 12**

The Magi visit the Messiah

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet had written: 6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"' 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.' 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Hymn with the Praise Band, *"Great is the darkness that covers the earth"*

Sermon **"Epiphany"**

Let us pray,

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

The word **epiphany** means an unexpected revelation. Sometimes an epiphany reinforces a decision we once made or it reaffirms an action that we are following. Then there are times that an epiphany dictates that we follow an entirely different path from the one we are following.

The Bible gives countless illustrations of epiphanies that changed lives and, on some occasions, the very course of history.

The Magi's instruction to take a different way home saved the life of the Christ child.

Paul's call to come over to Macedonia was his epiphany that turned him from travelling to the east, to going instead to the west and so brought the Gospel to Europe. It was just a small change, but it altered the course of history.

At the beginning of Isaiah chapter 60, the prophet says,

*"Arise, shine, for your light has come
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

*See darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you.*

*Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn."*

The word "light" is seen as a symbol of God's presence. In Isaiah chapter 9 we read that *"the people walking in darkness have seen a great light."*

God is going to dispel all the fears and gloominess of the night and his presence is the light that brings a new dawn.

As soon as I read that in verse 3, I remembered that on Christmas Day the Queen said that *"even in the darkest of nights, there is hope of a new dawn."*

The people of God had lived so long in exile, that they were a downhearted people who had lost their sense of purpose. Living with strange customs and distance from familiar practices and places, had meant that darkness covered the Israelites – but then came Isaiah’s revelation, his epiphany, letting his people know that they had **not** been forgotten and that God was still with them, shining through their darkness with his magnificent glory.

His people would once again be restored, and become a beacon of light guiding nations to a higher destiny. Once again, their light of influence would grow stronger. Such was Israel’s epiphany that it gave heart, hope and determination to God’s people who walked in darkness.

The fulfilment of Isaiah’s epiphany found its complete expression in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The revelation of Jesus to these seeking Gentiles is the epiphany of the waiting world struggling in its darkness and at last hearing the words, *“Arise! Shine! Your light has come!”*

But is our world today so different from the time of the Magi? I am sure that every one of you watching this online service, apart from losing a loved one, have never known of a darker time in your life – it is as if there is darkness all over our world, due to the pandemic.

In other years, we would be thinking about how much greed there is in the world today, and the abandonment of faith, the rise of secularism etc. While the sun rises each day and continues to set, so many people never turn to God for wisdom, guidance, love and forgiveness. The light of the Son of God was not only dimmed, but snuffed out like a candle by so many people.

The Israelites of another time also cried out in the frightening darkness that covered their lives. *“Watchman, what is left of the night?”* This is written in Isaiah chapter 21, verse 11. It is with these people of so long ago, that we peer into the darkness looking for the dawn of hope.

Today, so many people are frightened – although there is the real hope of a vaccine this year, the rise in the number of cases of coronavirus means our hospitals here in Scotland could well be overwhelmed.

Our journey through this pandemic has been long and, as I have just said, none of us have ever lived through anything like it before. Nor do we know when the end will come.

Just like the people of God, we are tired of wandering in the wilderness, adapting daily to new information and new ways of doing things is tiring.

Many people wonder how God could allow this to happen, and some people have lost their faith in God. This is where our story and that of the Magi converge.

We are not lost, we are travelling towards something greater than ourselves, and Emmanuel – God with us – is as close as our breath.

Last week, I discovered the Italian legend about La Befana. The tradition is that she delivers gifts to the children on Epiphany Eve, similar to St Nicholas or Santa Claus. A popular belief is that her name is derived from the Feast of Epiphany. Epifana is a Latin word with Greek origins meaning *“manifestation.”*

In the traditional story La Befana was the most renowned housekeeper in her entire village. She would happily spend the day with her broom sweeping the floor, cupboards and the front step. The neighbours knew her home was spotless. One day as she was sweeping, she was interrupted by a knock at the door.

When she opened it, she saw three strangers looking tired from travelling, but well-to-do. The first one said they had travelled a long way. The second said that they needed somewhere to rest, and they had heard that her house was the most hospitable in the village. The third told her the strangest thing of all: they were following a star.

Old Befana eyed them carefully. She had lived alone for a long time and she was cautious. They did not look like robbers, but more like scholars or wealthy merchants or possibly royalty of some kind from lands far away.

She showed them where she slept and they settled onto her small pallet, pulling up her blanket, and falling asleep immediately. Old Befana checked on the strangers from time to time, but they did not move. She wondered where they were from and why they were following a star.

When they finally awoke in the early evening, she offered them food and drink and asked them questions. They told her that they came from the East and were following a star that would lead them to a new-born child who was the king of the Jews, and who would be the king of all kings. The strangers wanted to reward her for her hospitality by inviting her along to find this child and give him their gifts.

Old Befana was so caught up in their story that she dropped her broom in surprise. To travel with three strange men following a star would not be proper! Besides, she did not know how long it would be before they found the king? Think of all the dust and cobwebs that would collect around her humble house! She shuddered as she pictured it and told the strangers kindly, but firmly, “*No thank you*” and she wished them good luck as they walked into the night.

When Befana went to sleep that evening, she tossed and turned as she dreamed of the strangers, the star and the baby bathed in light. When she woke up the next morning, she could think of nothing except the strangers, their story and their invitation.

All the time she spent thinking about that little king, who perhaps lived in a village just like hers, interrupted her cleaning schedule so much that, at last, she had a change of heart and decided to follow the strangers after all.

That night, she set off with her broom in one hand and little gifts tucked in her apron, looking for the light of the star, and peeking into every house along the way. If it looked like a child lived there, she would leave a little gift, as she could never be quite certain which child was born to be the king of all kings.

The story of Old Befana is therefore typically associated with Epiphany celebrations, as it relates to the strangers from the East, who came to seek where the king of the Jews can be found. The three strangers that both the legendary Befana and our Gospel’s story King Herod encountered were not kings.

As we heard in the NIV they are called Magi, in the GNB they are called Visitors, and in the AV they are called Wise Men. They were most likely to be astrologists or interpreters of dreams.

This would not have seemed strange to the people in the world in these days, as astrologers prophesied the birth of other prominent rulers such as Alexander the Great, from what was written in the stars and prophetic dreams happened to Gentiles and Jews alike – as we see in Matthew’s Gospel as well as the Old Testament.

In his Gospel, Matthew shows us that, through Jesus’ birth, the walls between races and cultures are breaking down. The Magi, who are Gentiles, have the ability to be obedient to God and follow the light – whereas King Herod, the chief priests and the scribes only want to get rid of Jesus.

There are two claims to the divine kingship which Jesus represents. The star leads the Magi as they seek to pay homage to Jesus, whereas Herod is afraid and plans murder.

The Magi followed the star to Jesus and we have all come to Jesus in our own way and, knowing Jesus, we change course then carry on in a different way in our own lives.

At Christmas, we sang in the carol, “*Hark the herald Angels sing.*”

“*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!*”

*Hail the Son of Righteousness,
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings."*

We are not the light that overcomes evil and sin, we are to reflect the light of Jesus, who is the Light of the world. Despite the darkness of these days of the pandemic, we know that God is with us.

As Christians in this dark, broken, hurting world, we are to reach out to our neighbours with the hope of a better future with Christ. No pandemic will ever put out the Light of the world.

Amen.

Hymn *"Look forward in faith"*

Prayer

Let us pray,

Lord of Light,

we have remembered this morning the journey of the Magi – how, inspired by what they took to be a sign, they set off in search of a new-born king, a king who would not simply change their lives, not merely the life of his people, but the life of the world.

We remember how they persevered in their quest, travelling in faith, even though they had no clear idea of where they were heading, or any certainty of what they would find when they reached their destination.

We remember how they refused to be discouraged, despite their reception in Jerusalem, despite the fact that no one seemed to have any idea that a new king had been born.

We remember how they kept going, single-minded in pursuit of their goal until, at the last, their determination was rewarded and they came face to face with Jesus.

Living God,

we pray that you will help us today to persevere through these difficult days, help us too, to refuse to feel discouraged, and to keep going day after day.

Loving God,

we bring before you now, our prayers for the world –those known to us and those unknown. We pray for all those whose lives are especially hard just now because of pain, illness or sorrow, or because they are overwhelmed by disaster, deprivation or injustice.

We pray for all those seriously ill with Covid-19 – those in hospital, and those ill at home.

Bless all those in the NHS, especially those working in ICUs here in Scotland and throughout the country.

Bless too all those who work in our hospitals, in so many different ways, to keep them functioning as usual.

We pray for all those struggling financially and give thanks that we can contribute to the local Foodbank.

Eternal and Ever-blessed God,

at the beginning of another year, we ask your blessing on Newton Wallacetown Church.

We still do not know when this church will be able to call a new minister, but continue to believe that you are with this church, and we ask your blessing on the Kirk Session and all the members of this congregation. May they continue to trust you for the future holding on to their strong faith in you.

Gracious God, we pray now for Anne McRonald's daughters, Jane and Lesley, her granddaughter Stephanie and son-in-law Tony. Please sustain them in the difficult days before the funeral.

Bless all those who have been bereaved in recent weeks, and those who are ill at home or worried about a member of their family.

In a few moments of silence, let us name before our Heavenly Father those uppermost in our hearts today.....

Bless each one, Lord God and help us, we pray, to let your light shine through our lives in the days, weeks and months that lie ahead.

This we pray through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord,

Amen.

Hymn *"We've a story to tell the nations"*

Closing Prayer written by Lee McGlone.

These words were written in 2008, but are so true for today.

Father, as we begin the cycle of years again,

let each day belong to you.

Let us look forward and not backward,

may grace see us through.

Grant peace to our hearts,

and courage your will to do.

Give us gentle and kind spirits,

may grace see us through.

In days of terror and fear

we stand on your Word that is True.

Your strength a comfort still,

your grace will see us through.

Amen.

Benediction

"May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

be with you all this New Year and for evermore,"

Amen.

Rona

Please remember in your prayers this week all of the people below in hospital, care homes or in their own homes:-

Mr Donald Grant	Mrs Irene Montgomerie (staying with daughter)
Mrs Gina McKnight	Mrs Jean Allardyce
Mrs May Wilkinson	Mrs Rena Bell
Mrs Catherine MacDonald	Mrs Heather McLeod
Mrs Anna Irving	Mrs Betty McPherson

Please let the Session Clerk know of any member/relative who goes in to hospital or is ill at home. For those in hospital please ensure you have their given Christian name which may not necessarily be the name by which s/he is usually known.

Prayer Chain Anyone having a request for prayer may contact Sheena Hunter on 01292 440804 or e-mail her at sheenachunter@hotmail.com

NB. Public worship Due to the Scottish Government placing South Ayrshire in Level 4 again from Boxing Day, please note that there will be **no worship in the hall** on Sunday **10th January**. You will receive notification via e-mail or telephone of when we will restart once it is clear what will happen thereafter.

Online Donations Do you shop online? If you do please remember that you can raise donations for the church at no extra cost to yourself. All you have to do is go to:-

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/> and register Newton Wallacetown Church of Scotland as your charity, then shop at the many different retailers who donate through the site. Remember though, that you have to go to the retailer through easyfundraising.

You can also raise donations when you shop at Amazon. Instead of shopping at the usual site, go to <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/> and register Ayr: Newton Wallacetown Church of Scotland as your charity and the business will make a donation to the church on qualifying purchases.

Organisation accounts Please could all organisations hand in their accounts to the church as soon as possible. They can be brought to the church on a **Sunday** between **2.00 and 3.00pm** or delivered to 38 Outdale Avenue, Prestwick, KA9 1BY. *Janis Meredith, Treasurer*

Salvation Army Food Bank Please note that donations can once again be brought to the halls' vestibule in the church drive between **2.00pm** and **3.00pm each Sunday afternoon** even when the church is closed due to Level 4 restrictions. Sincere thanks go to all who bring donations and to those who collect and deliver these each week. While staff at the food bank are extremely grateful for all gifts, at present they have an abundance of soup, beans, pasta, rice and tuna.

Items in shorter supply at the moment include tinned potatoes, other tinned vegetables, tinned stew, mince etc., "goodies" eg. biscuits and boxes of chocolates, coffee, toiletries eg. shampoo and soap, household cleaning products.

Ladies of the Guild This is just a reminder that **Joyce and Eleanor** will be in the **church drive** between **2.00 and 3.00pm** on **Sundays 3rd and 10th January**.

North Ayr virtual prayer meeting The first monthly meeting via Zoom will commence at 6.30pm on Monday 11th January and will be led by Rona on behalf of NWC.

Meeting ID 945 3854 5409

Password 272296

Birthdays Our good wishes for a very Happy Birthday in the coming week go to each of the following:-

8th January Ian Macpherson

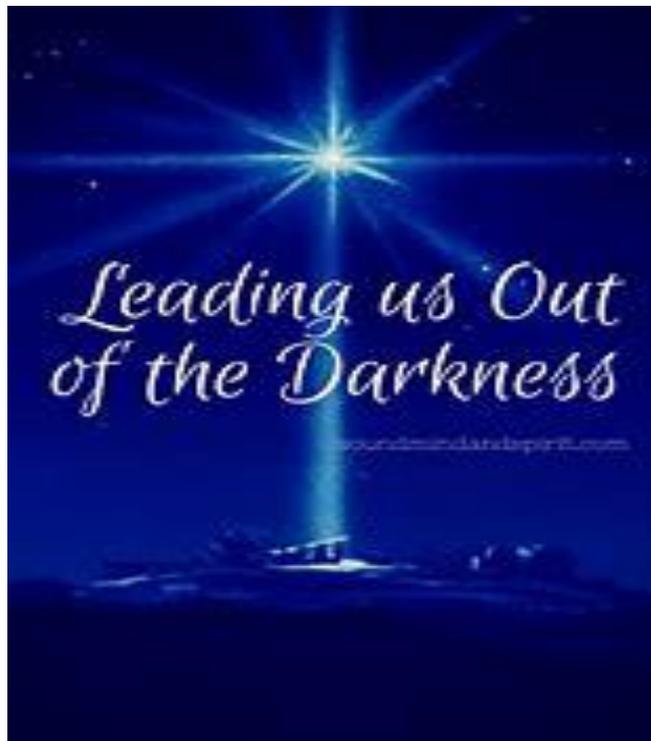
9th January Ronnie Coombes and Matthew McDowall



Children and young people How many words can you make from Happy New Year?



Remember Streaming of our morning service conducted this week by Rev. Rona Young and next week by Gary McCleary will commence at **11.00am** then our prayer time starts at **12.30pm** with the Lord's Prayer followed by our personal prayers. This helps to bring us together to reach out to him in prayer while we are distancing physically.



Ayr: Newton Wallacetown Church of Scotland

A Scottish Charity Reference Number SC001994

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