

Word of Life, January 2022

**We observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage
(Mt 2:2)¹**

These words are found only in the Gospel of Matthew. They are pronounced by "wise men" who have come from afar for a rather mysterious visit to the child Jesus.

They are a small group of people who have undertaken a long journey, following behind a small light in the sky. They are in search of a greater, universal Light, that is the King who has been born and is already present in the world. Nothing else is known about these men but this episode is rich in ideas that call for reflection and are relevant to Christian life.

This phrase was chosen by the Christians of the Middle East to celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year.ⁱ This time is a precious opportunity to set out again together, to be open to mutual acceptance, but even more to God's plan to be witnesses of his love for every person and people on earth.

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This is what the Christians of the Middle East write in the document that accompanies the proposals for this Week of Prayer: "... the star that appeared in the sky of Judea is a long-awaited sign of hope which leads the Magi and, indeed, all the peoples of the earth, to the place where the true King and Saviour is revealed. The star is a gift, an indication of God's loving presence for all humanity.... The Magi reveal to us the unity of all peoples willed by God. They travel from distant countries and represent different cultures, yet they are all driven by the desire to see and know the new-born King. They gather together in the grotto of Bethlehem to pay him homage and offer their gifts. Christians are called to be a sign of the unity he desires for the world. Although they belong to different cultures, races and languages, Christians share a common search for Christ and a common desire to adore him. The mission of Christians, therefore, is to be a sign, like the star, to guide God's humanity in its hunger for Christ and lead the way to him, and to be God's instruments to bring about the unity of all peoples."ⁱⁱ

The star that brought light to the Magi is for everyone: it first begins to shine in the depths of our consciences and then love enables it to burn more brightly. We can all catch a glimpse of it, set out to follow it and reach the goal of meeting God and our brothers and sisters in our daily lives and sharing our riches with everyone.

¹Taken from the New Revised Standard Version generally used for the Words of Life

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Paying homage to God is essential if we are to recognise who we truly are. We are fragile, small and always in need of mercy and forgiveness: as a consequence, we are sincerely disposed to show the same attitudes towards other people. This homage, due only to God, is fully expressed in adoration.

These words written by Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich, may help us: "... What does it mean to 'adore' God? It is an attitude that is directed to him alone. To adore means to say to God: 'You are everything,' that is: 'You are what you are'; and life is giving me the immense privilege of recognising this. ... It also means ...: 'I am nothing.' And not just saying so with words. To adore God, we must annihilate ourselves and let him triumph in us and in the world. ... But the surest way to proclaim with our lives that we are nothing and that God is everything is an entirely positive one. In the place of our own thoughts we can simply think of God and his thoughts as revealed to us in the Gospel. In the place of our own will, we have only to do his will which is shown to us in the present moment. In the place of our wayward feelings, we need only to have love in our hearts for him and our neighbours, sharing their anxieties, their pain, problems and joys. If we are always "love", without realising it we ourselves are nothingness. And because we live our nothingness, our lives affirm the superiority of God, his being everything, enabling us truly to adore God."ⁱⁱⁱ

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We can share in the conclusions of the Christians of the Middle East: "After meeting the Saviour and adoring him together, the Magi were warned in a dream to return to their countries by another road. In the same way, the fellowship we share in common prayer should inspire us to go back to our lives, our churches and the whole world along new pathways. ... Serving the Gospel today requires a commitment to defend human dignity, especially of the poorest, the weakest and the marginalised. The new road for the Churches is the way of visible unity which we pursue with sacrifice, courage and boldness so that, day after day, "God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28)".^{iv}

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iIn the northern hemisphere, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated 18 – 25 January. In the southern hemisphere this coincides with holiday time and so it is held at another time e.g. Pentecost, a time symbolic of the unity of Christians. It is always an invitation to renew commitment to Christian unity.

iiCf. <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/news/2021/spuc-2022.html>

iiiC. Lubich Word of Life Feb 2005

ivIbid