

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2025

Do you
believe
this?



A wyt ti'n credu hyn?
An gcreideann tú an méid sin?
A bheil thu a' creidsinn seo?



18-25 JANUARY 2025

www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer



Icon of Christ at the monastery at Bose, photo by Jim Forest

At the heart of our reflections for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is the question posed by Jesus to Martha: 'Do you believe this?' (*John 11:26*). This same question resonated throughout the deliberations of the first Ecumenical Council, meeting in Nicaea in 325, which gathered Christian communities from around the world to strengthen their relationships as the Church of Jesus Christ. Read in isolation the question might appear as a stark challenge, but from the Gospel story it is clear that the words of Jesus are spoken in love and experienced as invitation as well as challenge. Similarly, while the Council of Nicaea was not without its challenges as a wounded and scattered Church sought to discern the truth of the Gospel message, there was an obvious desire to deepen connection and belonging and to live faithfully as disciples of Christ.

Reflecting on these moments we are reminded that the gift of our faith brings both support and challenge. The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea this

year has been embraced with a hopeful enthusiasm in the global Church and in ecumenical bodies, inspiring a wide range of events and dialogues. It is valued as a significant moment of shared history across the different Christian traditions, despite the many ways in which our paths may have diverged in the years since. Some have remained closer to the Church envisaged at Nicaea with the Nicene Creed continuing to be of central importance as a statement of faith, while others have adopted non-credal models of Church placing greater emphasis on other forms of expression of shared Christian faith. Looking back together from our different perspectives presents an opportunity to deepen understanding and relationships, strengthening our unity in diversity.

While recognising the value of this looking back, we have also been conscious of the need to reflect on how we are responding to Christ's question in the circumstances of today, considering as we do so what we might learn from the example and experience of Nicaea. An important question in that regard, and one to which this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resource seeks to respond is: what is the relevance to the life and mission of the local church?

There is an opportunity to celebrate and draw strength and encouragement from the gift of our shared faith. In these troubled and turbulent times, we can take heart from the endurance of that faith. The Church that gathered in Nicaea was one that had been shaken and wounded by violence and persecution and was therefore close to the suffering of humanity. It was presented with an opportunity for dialogue with the political power which posed difficult choices about how best to share the Good News of the Gospel as faithful disciples of Christ, whose Kingdom is not of this world. In today's polarised world, when trust in the willingness of political powers and authorities, including the Church, to protect the most vulnerable has been undermined, how might a renewal of our commitment to Christian unity contribute to positive change?

Our polarised and fracturing world is in need of a new vision for peace, centred on the recognition of our inter-connectedness and shared humanity. As we gather to mark this anniversary, we have an opportunity to ask the hard questions about what may be getting in the way of our shared identity as Christians and our collective witness to the world. We are reminded of the transformative power of our faith which gives hope in suffering through the promise that all will be renewed in Christ.

Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORSHIP SERVICE



Prayer at the monastery at Bose, photo by Jim Forest

This year the ecumenical celebration has been prepared by the community of Bose, an ecumenical monastery of brothers and sisters in northern Italy. In Bose, community life is shaped by the rhythm of regular prayer. As the bells call the sisters, brothers and guests to prayer, they all assemble at the church.

As we celebrate 1,700 years since the Council of Nicaea, this worship service has at its heart, the Nicene Creed. Reflecting this, the scripture readings for this year focus on belief.

At this service the gathered community is invited to reflect on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as narrated in *John 11:17-27*. Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

As a response to the proclamation of the Word, we affirm our faith together in a solemn recitation of the Nicene Creed. This moment is marked by the sharing of

the light of Christ, symbolised by lighted candles. Candles are distributed and the light spreads through the gathering. We stand together as light of the world, united in love, affirming: “We believe...”. At the end of the creed, the lighted candles are placed together in a suitable and safe receptacle, to burn together as a reminder of our continued calling to Christian unity.

Another distinctive feature of this year’s worship is the inclusion of early Christian writers, most notably in the prayers of intercession. For the sisters and brothers of Bose, these writers are a living source for their shared life.

Material for each day of the Week of Prayer

The texts provided for personal or communal prayer for each of the eight days include two scripture readings and a psalm. The biblical texts for each day highlight in turn key statements of the Nicene Creed.

Day 1: The fatherhood and motherhood of God who rules the universe.

Day 2: Creation as God’s work.

Day 3: The Incarnation of the Son.

Day 4: The Paschal Mystery: Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Day 5: The Holy Spirit, breath of God.

Day 6: The Church: Community of believers.

Day 7: Baptism into the Death and Resurrection of the Lord.

Day 8: Waiting for the Kingdom.

Monastery at Bose, photo by Jim Forest



Day 1

The fatherhood and motherhood of God who rules the universe

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 63:15-17

Psalms 139:1-3, 13, 23-24

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

Commentary

Ancient writers, and the Bible itself, recognise the qualities of both Father and Mother in God, as Clement of Alexandria, one of the earliest commentators, notes, in God's 'compassion he has become for us mother'. We cannot truly conceive of the vastness of the universe, when it would take the fastest mode of transport we could now devise fifteen thousand years to reach the nearest star system to our sun, but we can begin to appreciate the miracle of that tiny, tiny part of the universe which we inhabit. Not everything around us is 'bright and beautiful' and we ourselves have abused our earth, yet it is God "who continually entreats us to take from his riches and to carry off wealth from his storehouse, that we may be rich

through his treasures and not poverty-stricken" (Philoxenus of Mabbug). May we be constantly mindful of the riches entrusted to us and of the privilege and the responsibility which that stewardship entails.

Questions

1. How have you experienced God's fatherly care and motherly compassion in your own life?
2. What hinders us from recognising each person as a child of God?
3. How does acknowledging God as the Father of all affect our perception of and relationship with others, whether next door or on another continent?

Prayer

We bless you, O Lord, Father of lights:
from you descends every good thing
and every perfect gift.

You have made the world and all that
it contains,
you are the Lord of heaven and earth.
You created All the peoples that dwell
on the earth.

For them you established the order of
time and the boundaries of their
space.

In the heart of human beings, you
have placed the depth of eternity.
Rebirth in us that unity that our
selfishness has fractured
in your Church and in the one world
around us.

God of all consolation,

call us to follow you
and make firm for us the work of
our hands.

We praise you through Jesus Christ,
your only-begotten Son,
in the communion of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.

Reflection

What is
all this?

What is 'is' at all?

You know, as we can only guess.

Enflame us, ultimate I Am, with the
wonder of being

when our understanding must bow to
your beyond.

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Consider how you can help renew the part of the world that you inhabit. What small act of service or care could you undertake to make a difference?

Local: How could you work with other churches to show God's love in your community? Invite churches near you to explore this question together.

Global: Seek out opportunities to learn about and connect with your global neighbours. This could be through strengthening your church's international links or engaging with global issues like the climate crisis.

Day 2

Creation as God's work

Scripture Readings

Genesis 1:1-5

Psalms 148:1-14

Romans 8:19-23

Commentary

Theophilus of Antioch wrote in the second century: "God cannot be seen by human eyes, but is seen and perceived through his providence and works. Just as one who sees a fully equipped ship entering port assumes that it has a pilot to guide it, so we must perceive that God is the pilot of the entire universe, even though he is not visible to the eyes of the flesh because he is incomprehensible." Isaac of Nineveh wrote centuries later that the "first book given by God to rational beings is the nature of created things. Instruction by means of ink was added after the transgression." These words that you are now reading are printed in ink on a page, or reproduced electronically online, yet they can only dimly represent the mark of God on creation. If we cannot marvel at God's work as Creator, we cannot marvel.

Reflection

As we dare to love life
we must know pain,
as love means knowing loss.
As you, our God, who has known
lost love
and faith bought by futility,
give us the strength
to dare to love each other
beyond the agony of rejection.

Questions

1. We believe that God is present in all of creation although his presence is sometimes difficult to perceive. How is God present in your experience of creation?
2. Creation is a gift of God subjected to suffering, often inflicted by human beings. How are the churches in your community working to heal the suffering of creation where you are?
3. How does recognising God as Creator influence your view of the diversity of human life?

Prayer

We praise you and give you thanks,
God of steadfast love,
for the great signs of your favour
and your mercy for the whole creation.

You have made all things:
you declared them to be good,
and you love all that brings life.
We proclaim, O Lord, your glory
seen in the immense starry vastness of
the universe and in the smallest
seed of life.

We give thanks for the works of
your hands
and the creation of all people.
Blessed are you for the air that gives
us life.

Blessed are you for the earth that
nourishes us.

Blessed are you for the water that
quenches our thirst.

Blessed are you for the fire that
warms us.

Lord God, Father of lights,
strengthen our hearts in expectation
and hope
as we work for unity and together seek
the harmony of all creation.

Let us be burning lamps,
until the day of the coming of your
Son in glory,
with all his saints in the everlasting
kingdom.

Blessed are you, now and forever, and
to the ages of ages.

AMEN.

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Explore creative ways to pray, through art, craft, or in nature.

Local: Seek out a church or group near you that is taking action to care for the natural world. Find out how you can help them.

Global: Consider how your actions can cause damage to God's world in places far from you. What can you do to address this?

Day 3

The Incarnation of the Son

Scripture Readings

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalms 72:12-14

John 1:1-14

Commentary

'In the beginning' the God who lives in relationship with the Son and the Spirit, displayed his heart for his beloved image-of-God, likeness-of-God, life-breathed-by-God human beings. Such was his commitment that not even the betrayal of human sin separated him from his unyielding love of those He created. Without him, we find ourselves untethered from that which allows us to live life as our best selves. We lose our true identity. The giving of his divine Son to join us in our humanity becomes our plumb-line of purpose.

"He became human, so that we who die as human beings might live again, and death should no more reign over us." – *Athanasius of Alexandria*.

This shockingly subversive act, if we receive it, must inform every aspect of our lives as we endeavour to inhabit his mindset, revealed through the gospels. He who made himself nothing

became a servant out of love and calls us, his people, to love him and others dynamically in all manner of creative ways.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth." – John 1:14

Reflection

Am I a gong?
Do I clang like a cymbal?
Do I argue,
break relationship?
Accuse?
Judge?
Am I wise, straight speaking and know
all things?
Do I give away everything?
Do I fast almost to death?
Do I do all things
but fail
to love?
Know, dear one,
wherever you place yourself,
above or below,
you are found, loved, rejoiced in
and protected beyond imagination.
It is in weakness you are powerful.
Allow servanthood to display your
best self.

Questions

1. As we learn about Jesus by reading the gospels, what steps are we taking to become our 'best selves'?
2. How do we experience Jesus' love and life in our communities?
3. How do we pray with Jesus for the needs of the world today?

We inhabit a world of overwhelming
'Me, me, I.'

Through our Saviour's supernatural
love
made flesh,
become an agent of change,
by delighting in loving.
Such love primes you for subversion.

*"Love is the most radically
subversive activism of all,
the only thing that ever
changed anyone,"
Ann Voskamp*

Prayer

Word of God
to teach us how to love.
May we allow you to share our life in
all things.
Lord God, our Father,
draw our eyes to you
so that together as your people,
we may walk from darkness embracing
the light of your face
revealed to us in Jesus,
your beloved Son, our brother and
Saviour,
who lives alongside You, at your
right hand
now and for eternity. **AMEN.**

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Reflect on the human ordinariness of Jesus' life – his travelling, eating, talking, resting. Where in your ordinary daily routines do you meet Jesus?

Local: Jesus calls us to meet him through our love and care for others (*Matthew 25:40*). Who in your community needs to be cared for and how can you help them?

Global: Choose three places around the world to pray for regularly. Learn about those places to inform your prayers and actions.

DATES

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from 18th to 25th January (the octave of St Peter and St Paul). However, some groups choose other times of the year, particularly around Pentecost which is a symbolic date for the unity of the Church. Do make your own decision, taking local factors into account. To allow for use at any time in the year, the Days material uses the notation 1-8.

ORDER OF SERVICE

The order of service in the centre of the pamphlet can be pulled out and photocopied if you wish. Alternatively, all resources can be downloaded from the CTBI website and you are welcome to further edit or adapt them for local use. Please acknowledge the source of material as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity resources.

CHRISTIAN UNITY WALL

Please add details and photos of your events, prayers and messages of unity to the Christian unity 'wall' at weekofprayer.org by posting to Twitter using the #wpcuwall hashtag. Posts appear automatically (after a slight delay).

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WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2025

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Do you
believe
this?



GUIDANCE FOR THOSE PREPARING THE WORSHIP

This year the ecumenical celebration has been prepared by the community of Bose, an ecumenical monastery of brothers and sisters in northern Italy. In Bose, community life is shaped by the rhythm of regular prayer. As the bells call the sisters, brothers and guests to prayer, they all assemble at the church.

As we celebrate 1,700 years since the Council of Nicaea, this worship service has, at its heart, the Nicene Creed. Reflecting this, the scripture readings for this year focus on belief.

At this service the gathered community is invited to reflect on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as narrated in John 11:17-27. Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

As a response to the proclamation of the Word, we affirm our faith together in a solemn recitation of the Nicene Creed. This moment is marked by the sharing of the light of Christ, symbolised by lighted candles. Candles are distributed and the light spreads through the gathering. We stand together as light of the world, united in love, affirming: "We believe...". At the end of the creed, the lighted candles are placed together in a suitable and safe receptacle, to burn together as a reminder of our continued calling to Christian unity.

Another distinctive feature of this year's worship is the inclusion of early Christian writers, most notably in the prayers of intercession. For the sisters and brothers of Bose, these writers are a living source for their shared life.

As the congregation arrives, everyone is given a candle (unlit).

Invitation

Leader Seventeen-hundred years ago, after a long period of persecution and fear, the Church gathered in Nicaea to affirm the Christian faith.

This faith, always ancient, always new, is our unending joy. Christ has risen from the grave, defeating death and darkness and bringing us everlasting life!

Leader Blessed be God, now and forever.
Come, let us bow down before the Lord our God.

Assembly **Holy God, Holy and Strong, Holy and Immortal,
 have mercy on us.**

Leader Let us celebrate the joy of the resurrection.

A resurrection hymn or song

Leader Let us pray.

Creator God, we worship and adore you.

Standing with all creation, we know ourselves to be
 made for your glory.

Reflecting your image and likeness, we feel your touch
 upon our lives.

Remembering your faithfulness, we bless you that you
 never give up on us.

Hearing your call to us, through story, saint and sage,
we bless you for your compelling presence in our midst.

Lord of life, we worship and adore you.
Standing at your tomb, with Mary, we weep.
Failing to know you, we hear you call us by name.
Knowing you again, we want to cling to you.
In your gentle love, you restore us
and compel us to call others to life in your name.

Spirit of power, we worship and adore you.
Recalling creation's story, we feel your brooding presence.
Travelling from slavery, we follow you into freedom.
Standing before the cross, we seek you in the darkness.
Burning with your fire, we are compelled
to discipleship.

Creator God, Lord of Life, Spirit of power,
We worship and adore you,

Assembly

Amen.

Listening to the Word of God

Meditative Reading (for three voices)

John 11:17-27

Reader 1

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.

(Silence)

Reader 2

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.”

(Silence)

Reader 3

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

(Silence)

Reader 1

Do you believe this?

(Silence)

Reader 2

Do you believe this?

(Silence)

Reader 3

Do you believe this?

Assembly

We believe, help our unbelief.

Gospel Reading

John 20:24-29

Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord”. But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe”.

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you”. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe”. Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Responsory

Reader Great is the Lord, great is his might.

Assembly **Great is the Lord, great is his might.**

Reader His wisdom has no bounds.

Assembly **Great is his might.**

Reader Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Assembly **Great is the Lord, great is his might.**

Silence/Hymn

Sermon

Silence/Hymn/Musical Interlude

Celebrating Our Common Faith

Leader Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”
In many Christian traditions, at baptism, the baptised (or sponsor) is handed a lighted candle. Jesus also calls his followers to be the light of the world. We are each bearers of the light of the risen Christ. We receive this light from Christ through one another.

The Leader lights the first candle and shares the light with those nearby, who in turn share the light throughout the assembly.

Leader We now invite you to share the light with one another with the words, “**The light of Christ**”.

When all the candles have been lit, the Leader continues:

Leader Let us love one another, so that with oneness of mind, we may confess the faith of the Church, ancient and new:

Assembly 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,

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 all, and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the
Virgin Mary,
and was made human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
On the third day he rose from the dead in accordance
with the scriptures.
He ascended to 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 worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the age to come.
Amen.

At the conclusion of the Creed the candles are placed in a central location, during which a suitable hymn, song or chant is sung.

Prayers of Intercession

Leader In this time of intercession we join our prayers in the present with the faith of the Church in ancient times.

Reader 1 For all things were made out of nothing, and their being would again sink into nothing, if the Author of all things did not hold it by the hand of governance.
(*Gregory the Great [c. 540-604]*)

Assembly **Lord of life, we receive all creation from your hand and by your providence. Teach us to live in your world with care and seeking justice for all that you have created.**

Reader 2 I call this faith: the intelligible light which by grace dawns in the soul, that supports the heart, and grants the gift of hope.
(*Isaac of Nineveh [7th century]*)

Assembly **Loving God, grant us the gift of hope in abundance in a world troubled by division and violence. Strengthen your people afflicted by apathy and fear.**

Reader 1 What wonder then, if, coming to God, we first of all profess that we believe, seeing that, without this, not even common life can be lived.
(*Rufinus of Aquileia [c. 344-411]*)

Assembly **Merciful God, forgive us for the times we have failed to live a common life as Christians. Draw us more deeply to one faith in you so that we may witness to the world.**

Reader 2 Truth sees God, and wisdom contemplates God, and from these two comes a third, a holy and wonderful delight in

God, who is love.
(*Julian of Norwich [c.1343- after 1416]*)

Assembly **Heavenly Comforter, we pray that we may trust more in the gifts of your truth, wisdom and love than in the cleverness of our thinking.**

Reader 1 The light of Christ appeared and made the darkness of the prison disappear and hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained.
(*Irenaeus of Lyon [c. 135-198]*)

Assembly **Compassionate Lord, lead us to work together so that wherever there is darkness and oppression, suffering and injustice, we may bring your light and freedom.**

Leader As brothers and sisters of Jesus, together we pray in the words he taught us:

Assembly **Our Father...**

Hymn

Concluding Prayer

(adapted from the Bose community)

Leader Almighty God,
accept our praise and thanksgiving
for what already unites us.
Hasten the hour when we will recognise each other
in the one communion you willed

and for which your Son prayed.
Blessed be God, now and forever.

Assembly **Amen.**

Sending Forth

Reader 1

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (*1 Peter 1:3–9*)

Leader The Lord be with you.

Assembly **And also with you.**

Leader May he who is our peace and has made us one,
grant that we may present one another to God in the
one Spirit.
And the blessing of God...

Assembly **Amen.**

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2025



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A note about the version of the Creed included in these resources:

The text of the Creed included in the worship service is the version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed normally used during General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical events.

In referring to the Holy Spirit, it omits the so-called filioque clause – “and the Son” – after the phrase “who proceeds from the Father”. This clause was not included in the text of the Creed adopted at the Council of Nicaea (325) or at the Council of Constantinople (381), but was added in the West in the sixth century, so as to underline the divinity of the Son in the face of the Arian heresy. Its inclusion has been the cause of dispute between East and West for many centuries and has been the subject of important ecumenical discussions in recent decades. The text also omits the Deum de Deo clause – “God from God” – in referring to the Son, which was included in the Creed at Nicaea but omitted from the version adopted at Constantinople in 381.

A 1981 report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, of which the Roman Catholic Church is a full member, recommended: “That the original form of the third article of the Creed, without the filioque, should everywhere be recognised as the normative one and restored, so that the whole Christian people may be able, in this formula, to confess their common faith in the Holy Spirit”. While the filioque clause remains part of the liturgical tradition of the Latin and some other Western Churches, Bishops of Rome omit it when reciting the Creed in ecumenical encounters with leaders of Eastern Churches. A 1995 Vatican document declared: “The Catholic Church acknowledges the conciliar, ecumenical, normative and irrevocable value, as expression of the one common faith of the Church and of all Christians, of the Symbol professed in Greek at Constantinople in 381 by the Second Ecumenical Council. No profession of faith peculiar to a particular liturgical tradition can contradict this expression of the faith taught and professed by the undivided Church.”

Day 4

The Paschal Mystery: The Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Scripture Readings

Philippians 2:8-9

Exodus 3:1-6

Isaiah 9:6-7

Commentary

In the creed we speak of Christ's humanity, of Christ humbling himself, even to death on the cross. However uncomfortable it might be, particularly in the current health obsessed culture, death has always been part of the Christian tradition and conversation. After all, being human gets messy: we make mistakes; we experience our bodily limits and failings; we hurt others; we die. Christ's redemptive work on the Cross destroys death and brings the promise of eternal life with God. This gives us confidence that we are loved by a God of mercy and forgiveness. As Irenaeus (a second century bishop) writes: "God the Father was very merciful: he sent his creative Word who, in coming to deliver us, came to the very place and spot in which we had lost life, and

broke the bonds of our fetters. His light appeared and made the darkness of the prison disappear and hallowed our birth and destroyed death." God does not stand aloof from us but came "to the very place and spot" where sin, suffering and death were found, right into the midst of human life.

"Hope is like a bird that senses the dawn and carefully starts to sing while it is still dark." (Anonymous)

Questions

1. We know that we will all die. How does belief in Jesus destroying death help us face this reality?
2. How can we encourage those around us to look at the inevitability of dying and death and to face both their fears and the fears of others?
3. This is a difficult subject for many people. How can we make ourselves available with faith, hope and empathy to walk alongside them in a wider setting?

Reflection

Rains fall, but do not soak –
Peace descends –
Beauty unfolds –
An opening,
A scent,
A perfect hymn of praise
Sung without words.

Presence deepens,
Emotion wells,
And tears meld with thankfulness.
To be known
Allowed to be.

Enfolding ripples of warmth
Flow in never-ending languor.
The presence of the numinous
Captured
Within and without
A simple human.

What promise awaits
When flesh departs to be emancipated
Into spirit?

Spirit and Spirit Three shall dance
A reel
Outside time
Into all things new.

Prayer

Risen Jesus,
Help me to grasp the good news that
you have taken the sting out of death,
and given us all glorious hope.
Take my fears and worries and let me
fully embrace the truth.
Living as a witness to others.
Speaking words of faith, hope and love.
AMEN.

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Have you planned for your own death? Take your worries about death to God in prayer. Talk to someone you trust about what you want to happen when you die.

Local: Bring a group of people together in your church to talk about death and dying. Ask for help from local organisations and charities to discuss issues like making a will, grief and what it means to die well.

Global: Consider how you can support a hospice and palliative care movement in another country.

Day 5

Holy Spirit, breath of God

Scripture Readings

John 20:19-23

Ezekiel 37:9-14

Psalm 104:24-34

Commentary

The Spirit of God from the beginning has breathed life. Some of our ancient texts help us understand more deeply the work of the Spirit and our invitation to receive the gift of this beloved Advocate.

The Spirit calls us to renew the face of the earth, joining in the work of forgiveness and healing. We cannot live out this call in our own strength, rather we must receive the gift of God's Spirit within us, just as the disciples gathered in the upper room experienced. Jesus, appearing to the disciples, said: 'Peace be with you', and showing them his hands and his side, breathed on them.

We are called as the Church to keep and nurture unity in Spirit. When we live apart from the Spirit we lose our breath and return to dust, but when we look to Jesus for life and breath, we are recreated for the work of renewal and the co-creation of the dream of God

to be made real here and now. "This is the Spirit by virtue of whom is poured out in our hearts the love with which we observe the divine commandments, by loving God and neighbour." It is our common calling, and common purpose as we are sent into the world.

Questions

1. Where do you sense the need in your own life for the breath of the Spirit to bring life and wholeness? Pray for God's breath to revive.
2. Where do we see the Holy Spirit at work, overcoming our divisions and drawing us into deeper unity?
3. God's Spirit renews the face of the earth every day – in the world around us and beyond us – where do we recognise this to be true and where do we sense a particular need for renewal?

Reflection

Swirl of dust moving along the face of
the ground,
untameable presence hovering above
the water,
flicker of flame and wisp of smoke.
There,
there you are.
Breathing, dancing, tending,
challenging, bristling with energy.
By your breath,
your dreams for the world are made
into flesh and bone,
animated by your love,
we can be fire dancers, peace breathers
and bone shakers.

Prayer

God, Giver of Life, Light of the World,
Breath of Heaven,
the one God three times holy –
Blessed are you past, present
and future.
We confess our common faith in you.
Let us rejoice in the Spirit,
who renews the face of the earth
and draws us towards unity.
Forgive us when our breath is
distasteful.
Enflame us with your Pentecost fire,
to speak the truth of the gospel that
brings freedom and life.
Awaken our prayers and give
them flesh
as we work with you,
to make well and full,
the whole of creation.

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Learn about how to use your breathing in prayer. Pray a short chant or 'breath prayer'. Invite the Spirit to guide you.

Local: Consider ways to reach out ecumenically to other churches near you, not only during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but across the year.

Global: Each February, churches across the UK mark Racial Justice Sunday. What is your church doing to respond to the injustice of racism and discrimination in the UK and around the world? Pray together for the wisdom of the Spirit as you explore this question.

Day 6

The Church: Community of believers

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 2:2-4

Psalms 133

Ephesians 4:1-6

Commentary

We are called to live with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

As the Church we must seek Jesus for the strength and humility to live out our calling, not just within our worshipping communities and ecumenically, but beyond our upper rooms: on Emmaus roads, sharing stories together that root us in our common story; gathered on shorelines where the risen Christ challenges us to feed his sheep; in the spaces and places that we know we need to be transfigured.

Jesus gathers us to be joined as his Bride, made up (as Maximus the Confessor puts it) of “many and countless people various and profoundly different in origin and appearance, nation and language,

way of life and age, knowledge and arts, manner of life, customs and propensities, sciences and honours, fate, temperaments and habits, all are in the [Church], through which all are regenerated and recreated in the Spirit.”

What a privilege to be part of such a rich and diverse community with a common call to make disciples, to bring peace and to work together in learning God’s ways and walking in God’s paths as we journey towards God’s Kingdom being made real in every community and corner of creation.

Prayer

God of our journeyings,
Christ of our shorelines,
Spirit of endless horizons,
beckon us towards unity.
Challenge us to step out of our upper
rooms and safe spaces,
to be bringers of light and peace.
Imbue us with the light of your love,
reconciling us
to ourselves,
to each other
and to you
when we confront the scandal
of division.

Graft peace, love and compassion into
our mission and discipleship.
Bind with peace any broken limb
that we might go into the world
and live the way of Jesus
for the sake of all creation.

Reflection

Her branches draped over me
create the shade of peace.
I recount stories of halcyon days
as I effortlessly drift towards slumber.
Leaning against your stoic mass, eyes
half shut
I notice mottled light through
the leaves
permeating the corners of my soul,
illuminating dreams once dead.
I awaken to the opening of
her blossom,
radiant and rich with the scent of hope

Questions

1. The Church is called be the light of Christ in the world. Where do you see this to be true and in what ways is it happening?
2. In Christ the Church is one body – how have you seen this to be true, and where have you seen opportunity for more co-creation?
3. The Church as the community of the Holy Spirit, the giver of peace, is sent to live and spread the message of peace in the world. In what ways might your local churches enable their members to fulfil this calling?

blown by the wind, whipped up
and bustling
through streets long devoid of
expectation and vision.

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Reflect on how you handle disagreement. Explore ways to build bridges with people who have different views to your own.

Local: “The Church is the Church only when it exists for others” (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*). Explore ways in which your church community live up to this calling of existing for the sake of others?

Global: Find out more about what churches are doing to take action on global justice issues through organisations such as Christian Aid and CAFOD.

Day 7

Baptism into the Death and Resurrection of the Lord

Scripture Readings

Micah 7:18-19

Psalms 51:1, 10, 12

Matthew 28:16-20

Commentary

John Chrysostom in Constantinople in the late 4th century wrote that in Baptism God lavishes upon us an “excess of his grace.” It comes like fire in our souls, transfiguring the ore of us into gold, “burning up the ‘image of the earthy,’ and producing ‘the image of the heavenly,’ fresh coined, bright and glittering, as from the furnace-mould.”

Ambrose of Milan, writing around the same time, says: “you dared not lift up your face towards heaven, you turned your eyes towards the earth, and suddenly you received the grace of Christ ... Lift up, therefore, your eyes to the Father, who has begotten you through baptism, to the Father who has redeemed you through the Son, and say, ‘Our Father!’ What once within us imprisoned our gaze downwards in shame upon the dust and dirt of the earth melts, releasing our eyes heavenwards to cry out ‘Abba, Father.’”

Reflection

Christ has buried your past
in the tomb with him
so that you can rise
in God womb of love
to new life
– begin again –
rise ever more
in Divine Yes to you.
God is taking care of your future.
It is an eternal one.
It has already begun.
You are soaked in it Christian,
dripping with it.

Prayer

With gratitude beyond all
possible language
we praise you, O Lord, and glorify
your name.

For having called us to the trusting of
faith in baptism,
for the communion we share in the
New Covenant,
for the unity we already enjoy and your
presence in the holy Church:
we praise you, O Lord, and glorify
your name.

For the witness of persecuted Christians,

for the suffering of their martyrdom,
for their participation in

Christ's passion:
we praise you, O Lord, and glorify
your name.

For all servants of communion,
for those who pray and work for the
reconciliation of churches,
for those who lay down their lives in the
service of unity
we praise you, O Lord, and glorify
your name.

Hasten the day, we beg you,
of the full mutual recognition of
our churches
that communion you desire,
and for which your Son prayed.
We ask this in the power of the Holy
Spirit. AMEN.

Questions

1. Christians are baptised into the dynamic love that is the death and resurrection of Christ. What does your baptism mean to you today?
2. Sin disfigures us in various ways, both personally and across the fabric of our communities. Through baptism, God liberates us. How can you live this freedom and the creative possibilities of love towards others in your area?
3. Given the different Church traditions and practices we have received, how does confessing together "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (*Ephesians 4:5*) affect our relationships with other Christians near and afar?

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Reflect on a transformative moment in your journey of faith. Share your reflection with others.

Local: Organise an ecumenical walk or pilgrimage together with Christians from other traditions.

Global: What has your faith freed you from? What has it made you free to do? Consider how you can live out the liberative power of faith by acting to help free those who are oppressed.

Day 8

Waiting for the Kingdom

Scripture Readings

Revelation 21:1-4

Psalms 85:8,10-12

Luke 12:35-40

Commentary

The Nicene creed concludes that we look forward to the resurrection of that which is dead and to life in the age to come. As Christians we believe in hope, even in the darkest of places, even in death. It is the transforming love of God that dares us to hope. Isaac of Nineveh writes, “whoever lives in love in this creation breathes the life coming from God”, declaring that “love is sufficient to nourish.”

Love is at the heart of the Kingdom of God, here on earth and also in heaven, where there will be no more death or division and all tears will be wiped away. As we pray for greater Christian unity in this life, we are to live lives of love and service to others. Christ embodied a life of love. Dorothee Solle writes, “Christ made God manifest by making invisible people visible – the

poor, women, all those deprived of their rights.” In our pursuit of greater unity, we work to make God’s love for all known and we wait in hope for the fulfilment of God’s Kingdom.

Questions

1. Consider how you are embodying signs of the coming Kingdom in the world today.
2. In Luke Chapter 12 we are called to ‘keep our lamps burning’ and be ready for the coming of the Kingdom. How are the churches in your local area preparing?
3. Where are you seeing signs of hope in the present age?

Reflection

What joy is there in hope?
What joy is there in unity?
We are hungry on the road,
and in God we are nourished.
When shall we be satisfied?
Only when we feed our sisters
and brothers.
Reaching out to humanity,
welcoming the stranger.
Touching creation as we watch
and wait.
For a time when righteousness
and peace kiss.

Keep your lamps burning, keep watch.
For there is joy in unity, there is joy
in hope.
In this hope we sing 'alleluia'.

Prayer

God of hope, you promise that the
poor in spirit will inherit the
Kingdom of Heaven.
Bring new life to those who trust
in you.
Christ, you know the pain of division,
yet in sadness you teach us the way
of consolation.
Help us to remember that you are the
joy that cannot be removed.
Jesus, you cast down the powerful,
promising to clothe the
peacemakers with a glorious robe,
calling them the Children of God.
Make us bearers of your peace.
Christ of mercy and compassion, you
forgave the thief who died with you
on a cross.
Remember us all when you come into
your kingdom. **AMEN.**

Go and do

(see www.ctbi.org.uk/goanddo)

Personal: Who is made to feel invisible or overlooked in our world today? What can you do to reach out to someone in that position?

Local: Find out about an individual or community dedicated to bringing hope to a divided world. Think about how you and your church can follow their example or join their work.

Global: Learn more about the World Council of Churches (WCC) at www.oikoumene.org. How can you support the WCC's work of promoting Christian unity in prayer and action?

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2025



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X (Twitter): #wpcu2025
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ISBN: 978-0-85169-424-5


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IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND®

Published by

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Interchurch House
35 Lower Marsh
London SE1 7RL
info@ctbi.org.uk,
Tel: 0203 794 2288

Registered charity no. 1113299.
Company limited by guarantee,
registered no. 5661787.