

Step by step

John Witcombe *reflects on* Isaiah 9:1-4, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 and Matthew 4:12-23

Epiphany is when we hear stories of God being revealed in the world – and when we ask for God to be revealed in our own lives. In today's readings we're encouraged to trust that, no matter how dark, the true light will always shine – whether in the world, or in the Church. The first two readings for today recognise that the people of God will sometimes find themselves walking in darkness, whether in the world (Isaiah) or even in the Church (Paul, in the letter to Corinth). Just as the world can feel a dark place because of violence and oppression, so even a local church can be a place where the darkness of disagreement and conflict can cloud the horizon.

Jesus speaks to us through the words of the Gospel, calling us to repent, to turn away from darkness and seek the light. If we are to follow him, it will always mean leaving something of our old life behind – and that's never going to be easy. It could be that the place where we are feels too dark to find the path forwards, so we just don't know where to tread. These are times to ask God to make it clear, step by step. As we take single steps forward, following God's voice, the darkness will fade to grey and God's light will start to shine.

The magi followed a star: we follow the light of Christ, which the darkness will never extinguish. ☩

Holy God, you call us to step out of darkness into your marvellous light. Help us all, even those who find it hard to see the way, to find the path that leads back to you and your life for each of us. Amen.



Purposeful prayer for the new year

Part 4 – trusting God with the outcome

by Caroline Hodgson

Caroline concludes her series looking at how we can refresh our prayer life in 2026.

Surrender is a key part of purposeful prayer. Prayer isn't about controlling situations but placing them in God's hands. Purposeful prayer cultivates peace, reminding us that God is always shaping our lives with limitless love. Or, as the author Philip Yancey put it: "Prayer is a declaration of dependence upon God."

When you pray, take a moment to practise letting go of the need for immediate answers and trusting that God hears every word you say and knows every thought that you think. You can do this through your breath – consciously using the out breath to let go. You should feel your whole body relaxing, even if just a bit. And with practice this should become more natural.

When we learn to surrender control we discover a deeper faith, resting in the assurance of God's goodness, even when the way ahead seems uncertain. ☩

“ Faith, as Paul saw it, was a living, flaming thing leading to surrender and obedience to the commandments of Christ.”

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), pastor, author, editor and spiritual mentor

by Gillian Cooper

We go to the beach with my sister and Rosie's friend, Ettie the cocker spaniel. It is windy and cold, and I am hunched into my coat and scarf. But Ettie is quivering with excitement. She rushes up to greet me – she has said hello in the car, but it has to happen all over again now we're on our feet. Then she is off, chasing her ball, jumping in pools, greeting other dogs, all at

high speed. Meanwhile Rosie is dutifully playing with her ball in the hope of a treat in advance of the coffee shop visit she knows is coming next.

Ettie teaches me about joy. About finding pleasure in small rituals and regular outings, which to her are newly exciting every time. She teaches me about maintaining and renewing the relationships which make life worthwhile. She is God's messenger of light to me in the cold dark winter. ☩