**January 2023 Inclusion**

Welcome to the January Prayer, and the fifth in a series of 12. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction**

Our way of prayer for this month is the prayer of intercession, when we pray, intercede, for other people, other parts of the world, rather than for our own self. In church the prayers of intercession form a part of the service, and of course this is a prayer we can pray at home too, on our own. A little more of this way of prayer shortly.

The theme for this month is inclusion. Inclusion or being inclusive may mean different things to different people.

 *What does inclusion and being inclusive mean to you?*

*Is there a person, a group of people, a place in the world, that you would find it difficult to include in your prayers of intercession? If there is, think about why?*

**Reflection**

January is a wonderful month to consider how we may become more inclusive, individually, and as a gathered church, as we celebrate Epiphany and also the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It is a time when we can remember our own uniqueness as created in the image of God, and the uniqueness of everyone else too.

Difference and diversity can be seen across the world, and yet it comes together and forms a rich tapestry of humanity and creation. In our humanity though, we also have our biases and prejudices which can get in the way our welcoming all people or bringing them into our prayer. Naming our prejudices can be the first step towards a more inclusive way of living.

***Prayer of Inclusion***

All loving God,

you call me to love my neighbour as myself,

help me to pray for those I find it hard to love or call ‘neighbour’.

Show me the way in which I can offer a welcome

to those I call a ‘stranger’, those different from myself,

and see in them, your holy presence.

Reveal within me a generous heart

and accept my slow and hesitant steps to include all

when I come before you in prayer.

This I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

January marks the beginning of a New Year, and for many the making of resolutions. It’s a time to look back on the year just ended and ahead to the one beginning.

*What are your hopes and dreams for this new year?*

***Prayer for New Year***

At the beginning of a New Year,

walk with me Companion God,

so I travel with hopefulness and expectation

of all this year may bring my way.

Guide my journey so it may be

one of welcoming inclusion,

inwardly in times of prayer

and outwardly in the way I live my life.

This I pray in your Holy Name.

Amen.

**Bible Passage**

From the gospel of Matthew, we read these verses, 2. 1-2, 19-21, but if you can, read through the whole passage:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

**Reflection**

In the Church on 6th January, we remember the visit of the Magi who had travelled from foreign lands to see the new born child, Jesus, Son of God. They had a long journey but their belief and hope that a new king had been born kept them going.

The Magi made the mistake of assuming that this new king would be born in a grand palace and not in a borrowed stable. This mistake led them to Herod who gave the pretence of wanting to meet this new born baby himself, but in his heart was murder! Herod wasn’t happy and wouldn’t be including the Holy Family in his prayers!

It is so easy to make assumptions when we see or meet someone, but only when we listen to them do we find out who they really are; and we may be surprised at how much we can learn from them, or discover how similar we are.

*Is this something that you have experienced? If you have how did that effect and change you?*

**Prayer for the Month: The Prayer of Intercession**

Prayers of intercession come in a variety of shapes and sizes! In church we are asked to pray under five headings – for the church, for the world, for our communities, for those who are ill, and for those who have died. Seasonal prayers and references can also be included to begin or end the prayers, or lines from a hymn being sung that day, or from a bible passage for the day. These prayers don’t need to sound like a shopping list or include absolutely everything!

When praying this prayer at home, you may find it helpful to use the pattern suggested here, or to pray for different concerns on different days of the week. For example, Monday for the local community, Tuesday for friends and family, Wednesday for all carers and emergency service workers, Thursday for the environment, Friday for the world, and Saturday for those in need of healing. You will no doubt have other areas of concern to bring into your prayer, and when personal or world events draw you to prayer, these can be included on any day of the week.

Thinking about January and inclusion, you may find the following prayers of intercession a pattern to follow:

At the beginning of a new year, with all of its potential and possibility, guide all people to seek the way of justice, inclusion and peace. To God we pray:

For the Church – grant to us the confidence of faith to come and encounter you, and from that encounter be sent out to share the news of your presence in this world – *pray for church leaders, particular concerns of your church, areas seeking growth etc*

For the world – that all elected to a role of authority use that position to follow the ways of peace, to address poverty and inequality, and seek a sustainable future for this world – *pray for particular places of conflict, areas devasted by extremes of weather etc*

For the local community – for the well-being of friends and neighbours, the upkeep of green spaces, and that a welcome is offered to all who live in in the area, and to those who visit - *pray for local businesses, schools, care homes, hospitals, emergency services etc.*

For all in need of healing – for peace and calm within all who are anxious, support given to all in need, for compassion and a listening ear to those who are struggling, friendship and care for all who are unwell – *pray for all who offer care to others, pray by name those known to you [in church their permission is needed] etc*

For all who have died – for their eternal rest in the presence of God, and comfort given to all who grieve – *pray by name, remembering those whose anniversary falls at this time etc.*

 These our prayers, offered from our hearts are brought to you, O God,

in the name of Jesus Christ who calls us to prayer,

and the Holy Spirit who untangles the prayers we cannot find words for. Amen.

**Concluding Reflection**

After all the joy of Christmas and New Year celebrations, it’s easy to forget that Jesus, along with Mary and Joseph then became refugees until after Herod’s death when it was safe for them to return home.

In the world today we hear of so many refugees who have had to flee their country and home to escape danger. As we consider what it means to be inclusive, how do we welcome, and pray for, refugees especially when they look and dress and speak differently to us. It can be difficult to pray for people we do not fully understand, and for those who have hurt us, and yet they too need our prayers.

From these transforming moments, the visit of the Magi, the life and ministry of Jesus and the early disciples, the word of God was sent out across all the nations. God’s Word for all people, wherever and whoever they are.

**Suggested Reading**

There are many books available with prayers of intercession for the Church Year and special occasions.

Bi-lingual resource: *Arwain Ymbiliau/Leading Intercessions*, Canterbury Press, 2003

The Church in Wales website has a page for prayer and prayer resources

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme and prayers will be Love and a prayerful reading of a bible passage.