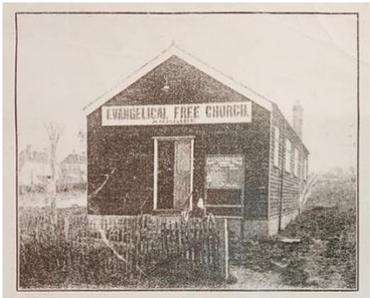


## Church at Home for January 24<sup>th</sup> 2021

*'You are the light of the world...*

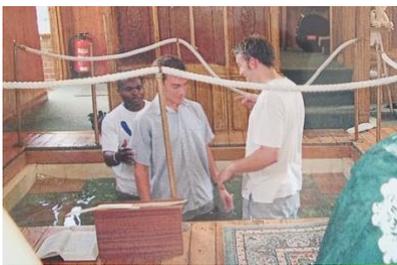
*let your light shine so that people may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'*

Matthew 5: 14,16



This Sunday marks the 97th anniversary of the Church on the Chase here in Abridge. It's always been the church's custom to celebrate its birthday with a special service, hence this edition of church-at-home reflects this milestone. The church family at this church hopes that all who are reading this will find the stories, reflections and the focus of this worship resource helpful, particularly in the season of Epiphany, when we remember how the light of God continues to shine today through his followers everywhere.

Founded as Abridge Evangelical Free Church in 1924, on land bought by Herbert White from South Woodford, the church has been 'a light set on a hill' among the community of Abridge, supporting people through the financial hardships of the 1930s and during the dark days of the Second World War when it provided hospitality for the airmen stationed at Stapleford aerodrome. In partnership with St



Mary's, it produced the very first copies of Link up to foster community life in the village and it has offered a place of worship for local Christians, with many being dedicated here as infants, baptised by immersion, married or accorded a Christian funeral. The church has hosted and continues to host assemblies for the local Primary School and is a place of celebration for life

events; it has been a venue for holiday clubs, an open youth group that met in the hall that used to be next to the present church, and a focus for community gatherings. These are just some of the ways in which the light of the good news of Jesus has shone through this church for almost a century.



It all began with a mission to the area in 1924 when local families gathered to hear the good news about Jesus explained by a team who arrived in a horse-drawn wagon bearing the message 'God is love'. This is still the message shared in what is now known as Abridge Village Church, as it witnesses to the God who made us, who loved us so much that he sent Jesus to rescue us from the selfishness

that spoils us and all creation, and who shines unto our hearts by the Holy Spirit to help us become the best we were made to be. Our readings this week explore these great truths about God, who is light and love for us all.



## Here are the Bible readings for this anniversary Sunday:

[Matthew 5:11-16](#) - In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus invites his followers to shine with God's light and to be like salt, adding flavour and freshness to the world.

[2 Corinthians 4: 4-7](#) - The apostle Paul describes Christians as clay jars through which God's light can shine into the world. We are part of God's Epiphany!

*God said, 'Let light shine out of darkness. He made his light shine in our hearts. His light gives us the light to know God's glory. His glory is shown in the face of Christ.'*

## Here are some suggestions for hymns and songs:

[Shine Jesus Shine](#)

[This little light of mine](#)

[Arise shine your light has come](#)

[Shine \(Matt Redman\)](#)

[Light of the world you stepped down into darkness](#)

[Christ be our light](#)

[Jesus, you are changing me](#) by Marilyn Baker



## A Collect for Epiphany 2

*God of glory,  
you nourish us with your Word  
who is the bread of life:  
fill us with your Holy Spirit  
that through us the light of your glory  
may shine in all the world.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*



Take a moment to think back to your own beginnings in the Christian faith. Was there a special place where you first heard about Jesus? Who first showed you the light of Christ? Who have been faithful companions for you on your journey of faith? What special memories do you have of worshipping in church? What have been key moments for you as a disciple of Jesus?

Give thanks to God for those who shared the Gospel with you and bring before God those with whom you long to share that same Gospel.

Also name the dark experiences and memories that may have also come to mind as you've reflected on your God story and ask God's light flood in and bring you back to a renewal of faith in Jesus for the week ahead

Jesus says to you: **I am the light of the world and whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life** (John 8:12)



## Reflections on our anniversary theme from Keith White

One of the commissions that we have been given as individual followers of Jesus, and a fellowship of believers, is to be the light of the world. This seems so unlikely as to be almost ridiculous. How can each of us, or two or three meeting in His name, possibly be the light of the world? It's puzzling for another reason: Jesus also said, "I am the Light of the World" (John 8: 12). So, is He the light of the world, or are we? Let's explore the question to try to make some sense of things, and what it means for our personal lives, and the life of the church.



From the dawn of creation (as revealed in Genesis) God has been making light to shine in the darkness. Sometimes there have been very dark expanses of the universe, and periods of world history, but the light has continued to shine, and the darkness has never extinguished it. The central moment in the cosmic battle between darkness and light was the time when Jesus, the crucified One, was raised from the dead, and a new day dawned: not just for 24 hours in Palestine, but for all time and the whole world. This confirmed that He

was, is, and will be the Light of the World. And the time will come (as foretold in the Revelation of St John) when the whole of creation will rejoice together in harmony as His light suffuses and enlightens all things.

However, in the period between the dawn of Easter Day, and the coming of Christ as King, God has chosen to use us as part of His Creation to be the light-bearers. Which we discover in the words of Jesus: "You are the light of the world".

How can this possibly be? After all we are the most unlikely and inappropriate people to be the light of the world, in fact we are much more like ordinary jars, formed out of lumps of clay. The answer that the Apostle Paul, a fellow follower of Jesus, gave, is a very simple one. We are jars of clay, but in Christ, God has come into these unpromising and undeserving jars. Just as He entered the world in the manger at Bethlehem, so He enters the humble lives of His followers, and His glory shines within us as the face of Christ.

So there we have it: when by God's grace, and through the work and guiding of the Holy Spirit, we open our hearts to Christ, He comes in, and His light begins to shine in us...and through us. How through us? Well, often the clay of which we are made prevents the light shining, but light has a way, like water, of finding the cracks. And as Christ lives within us, He changes us, so that in little, gradual, quiet ways, we become more like Him. And as we go about our daily lives and seek to serve Him by the way we do things and help, support and care for others, and His Creation, others notice from time to time the way we do things, and our attitude. Sometimes when they notice these things, they trace them back to source.



How is this? Well, one of the commitments we are called to make as followers of Jesus, the Light of the World, is to make a public confession of our faith through baptism. Whether it's by sprinkling or immersion it is a way of letting everyone know that we belong to Jesus. So without the need for boasting or bragging or nagging, in one way of another people, our families, neighbours, friends, colleagues, know that we are followers of Jesus. In some countries they know this by the Christian name a person is given. By being baptised, worshipping regularly, and belonging openly to a fellowship of believers, we are identified as disciples of Jesus Christ. So when people see our good works they have a way of tracing them back to our Heavenly Father who through Christ is living in and working through us.

We are the light of the world, not because we are worthy or good, but because Christ has been willing to enter us, clay jars, and live within the cramped space of our imperfect egos and characters. Over the years since the fellowship that meets in this place started in 1924, there have been many ways in which individuals have been light in the village of Abridge, in its streets and groups. Those living in the village have often been stalwart members of clubs and groups; have been good neighbours; have prayed for others, cared for and about them, and been willing to do the meanest task to help them. On one occasion I was in someone's house, when a Christian neighbour dropped in with an onion: it was what the person I was praying with needed for their next meal. When I was minister of the church I often found when visiting people in the parish, that they told me of ways in which members of the fellowship had already been helping them. The light of Christ shining through them.



And through the fellowship, the church, Christ's light has blessed the village. Regular worship, summer and winter, sun and rain; the canteen in the war; the decision not to have our own magazine but to join with St Mary's in starting *Link Up*, and for the first years to put it together with staples in our hall; Sunday School, clubs for children and young people, including the Youth Club and Bible Class, have been the means of people seeing the light of Christ. One of those who told me this recently was David Barr. He wrote to say that he owes everything important what he learnt through the church and its leaders.

We are acutely aware of the many times when we fall short of the mark. We wish we could do more, and were better disciples of Jesus, but despite our frailty, He continues to shine through us: often through the cracks, rather than anything solid that we do.

Let me close with an example from another church. It is one that always moves me. I was leading a church retreat at Sizewell Hall, Suffolk. And as I always try to do, I met with different members of the church at each meal, listening to their stories. One Saturday over breakfast, I asked a lady called Sylvia and her husband John how they had come to faith. John smiled and indicated that Sylvia would tell me. Sylvia explained that she was the President of the Cambridge Townswomen's Guild, and had become increasingly impressed with the Secretary of the group. She was efficient, gracious both in what she did, and in the way she lived. So was so impressed and intrigued, that one day she asked her Secretary, whose name was Pam, the secret of her loveliness and efficiency. Pam was surprised and said she couldn't explain something that she didn't recognise. Some time elapsed before Sylvia pressed the point. "I wish I were more like you", she said. "What is the source of your goodness and kindness?" Pam was still self-effacing, but explained to her President that she was a follower of Jesus and a member of a local church. Sylvia asked if she could come along with her husband. They came, and the rest is history. In time they both became followers of Jesus too. And I have seen the light of Jesus shine in their lives as well as that of Pam.



So it is not complicated. We are the light of the world because the light of Christ shines into our hearts and through us. When people see that, and know we are followers of Jesus, then they have the opportunity of praising our Heavenly Father the source of all good works.

May we who are called to be part of the church of Jesus Christ, of whatever name or denomination, be faithful to our calling, our baptism, and our Saviour and Lord, allowing His light and goodness, His healing and hope shine into the places where we live and work.

**For our prayers,** let us remember:

Hospital staff treating patients suffering from COVID 19; staff at our surgery and elsewhere across the country administering the vaccine; Roger and Beryl as they settle in to their new home; events surrounding Holocaust Memorial Day; the united witness of the Christian Church at the end of this week of prayer for Christian Unity; today's news headlines and any particular situations and people in other countries that God has placed on your heart; those known to us who are facing hardship, who are anxious or who have been bereaved.

Add any other particular people and situations that The Holy Spirit brings to your mind as you have been praying and then say our family prayer, **The Lord's Prayer**.

End the time of church-at-home by saying out loud the words of **The Grace**, reaching out your hands to include in your imagination all those you know and love, who live here in the village and beyond

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## Further activities and reflections on the theme of celebration

The Gospel Reading set for this Sunday is also a celebration, namely the wedding at Cana in Galilee where Jesus revealed the light of his glory by turning water into wine.

You can read the story [here: John 2: 1-11](#)

[Here](#) is a reflective version of the story using wooden figures and wondering questions

[Here](#) is an animated narration of the story

[Here](#) is a song linked to this story by Michael Card

[Here](#) is a video of this story

**There is a short reflection from Roger (*the Youtube link will be sent separately*)** exploring the connection between the miracle at the wedding to the great marriage at the end of time between earth and heaven when Christ returns, as described in the book of Revelation. It's all about transformation

### A reflection, questions and an activity for the whole family on this theme

A village wedding at the time of Jesus was a big occasion and the celebrations could easily go on for a week. No wonder the wine ran out! This would of course have been a huge embarrassment for the hosts, who may well have been friends or relatives of Mary's family. To make matters worse, it was clearly quite a society wedding with servants on hand and even someone especially appointed in charge of the food and drink. The miracle that takes place though comes about because of Mary's total faith in her son. Her instructions ('Do whatever Jesus tells you to do') are the only words on record from Mary during Jesus's adult ministry and they both reflect her life of obedience to God and are a command for us to take to our hearts also. Jesus seems reluctant to respond to Mary at first, but out of love he does secretly rescue the festivities from disaster. This was his first miracle and points forward to an even greater one that will come one day when 'his time' at Easter does arrive. Then, because of who he is and what he does, the everyday water of this life can be turned into the rich wine of the best we can all become. And just as happened at Cana, there will be more than enough new life for all, with plenty left over.

### Questions

1. I wonder why Mary thought that Jesus would be interested in the problem of there not being enough wine.
2. The servants must have thought that Jesus's instructions were crazy! But I wonder why they obeyed him nonetheless?
3. What affect did the miracle have on Mary, her family and Jesus's disciples?
4. Do you think that this miracle might have some special meaning for us today?

### Activity idea

Imagine you're in charge of the food and drink at a special wedding. Lay a table together with as many fancy extras as possible - lots of cutlery, colourful serviettes, plenty of glasses, a printed menu of your favourite food, balloons, party poppers, special confetti on the table cloth and favours in a bowl. Everything should be perfect; but then add a jug of water to the display! This is all there will be to drink. Talk about how people would be disappointed and even angry. After a while, make it all good again by 'discovering' some tasty juice to drink after all. Enjoy that drink together.

### Prayer idea

Mary had learned from bringing up Jesus that he was special and that nothing was too small or ordinary for him to bother about. This is why she was confident that he would help the wedding hosts. Similarly nothing is too ordinary for us to bring to God in prayer. On some paper cut out in the shape of jars, write in blue, prayers about anything and everything. Pin these up somewhere. Come back to them later in the week and see how God has answered each prayer and when he does, colour in each jar in red and thank God for the way he can change everything for us.