

# CELTIC EVENING PRAYER



## THE CELTIC CROSS

### OPENING PRAYERS

*We Bless One Another* †

God of peace be with you,  
Jesus of peace be with you,  
Spirit of peace be with you  
and with all you love,  
each day and each night  
of your time in the world  
Amen.

**O God,  
You made the moon to mark the seasons  
and the sun knows when to go down.  
May You be praised day and night,  
may You be praised in all places,  
may you be praised by all that has breath.  
Amen.**

## **SCRIPTURE**

***John 4 : 19-26***



‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’

‘Woman,’ Jesus replied, ‘believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.’

The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you – I am he.’

# THE CELTIC CROSS

The Druids marked their holy places with pillars of stone or wood, often with a circle at the head. The circle symbolised the sun – a major pagan divinity. The message of the Celtic missionaries was simple : ‘We have not come to deny the importance of the sun. Rather, we have come to introduce you to the one who is behind *even* the sun and who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus.’ Hence, the pillar with the circle at its head developed into the Celtic cross, with the arms of the cross superimposed or extending from that central orb. The Celtic saints did not insist that a change of religion meant a change of culture – quite the reverse. Druid holy sites were adopted and claimed for Christ. Sacred wells were transformed into baptismal waters. The places where local people gathered for Druid rites would become the gathering places for Christian worship.

The cross instead of the pillar would mark the place. Some of these crosses were twenty feet high.

Early Celtic mission was of ‘no fixed abode’, the missionaries favouring a wandering, teaching, evangelistic ministry and crosses sprang up across the landscape. They were often highly decorated with biblical teaching. One side might be full of Old Testament scenes and the other side depicting the New Testament – especially the crucifixion and resurrection. They were pictorial visual aids in a non-literate age. Above all, these crosses were not



meant to be quaint monuments, but aids to prayer, drawing people into the mysteries of God. They spoke of the Creator behind even the sun, of Jesus on the Cross and of Creation, shot through with redemption. They invited people to pause and consider, to reflect on life and on God, to spend time in prayer and adoration and to leave feeling different because of that time spent at a holy place. ‘The time is coming’, says Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well, ‘when you will worship the Father ... in Spirit and in truth.’ In other words, *everywhere!* For if the Spirit is within you, that place where you are becomes holy, touched by a holy person.

Celtic knotwork appears not only crosses, but is famously preserved in the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. The designs were never intended to be just pretty patterns, but to communicate deep truths about God and about life : just as the patterns have no end, neither has God. The Celts believed that the devil is frustrated by anything that has no break in it, no doorway for access. Hence the unbroken line and the circle were important.

Many designs involve twisting, sinuous animals, plants and people, demonstrating a primitive awareness that everything shares its origin in God and is part of one, interwoven life – one great eco-system. In some of the simplest designs, God is seen to be eternally One, yet Trinity. To draw the threefold picture of God, explains the Trinity in a way that words can never do.



## REFLECTION

**‘For if the Spirit is within you, that place where you are becomes holy, touched by a holy person’**

*What a wonderful, moving thought – especially in these strange times we currently inhabit. As some people return to church buildings to worship, others continue to worship elsewhere – perhaps in a garden or on the beach. The early Celtic Christians lived not merely close to nature, but **with** nature. They had an overwhelming consciousness of the Presence of God in the natural world, seeing it as a revelation of the Divine and a place of encounter with God. Whether we choose to worship in church, in our home or outdoors, God is ever-present and his Spirit within us makes holy our chosen place of encounter with Him. Let’s take a few moments to reflect on the Celtic Cross. Follow the unbroken, interwoven pattern of the knotwork. Give thanks for the glorious Creation of which we are a part and the unending love that created and sustains it. Perceive the eternal nature of God. The eternal nature of love.*

## POEM

### from the Black Book of Carmarthen

(Oldest surviving manuscript in Welsh – 13<sup>th</sup> century)

I am the wind that breathes upon the sea  
I am the wave on the ocean  
I am the murmur of leaves rustling  
I am the rays of the sun  
I am the beam of the moon and stars  
I am the power of trees growing  
I am the bud breaking into blossom  
I am the movement of the salmon swimming

I am the courage of the wild boar fighting  
I am the speed of the stag running  
I am the strength of the ox pulling the plough  
I am the size of the mighty oak tree  
and I am the thoughts of all people  
who praise my beauty and grace.

## WE PRAY

**O Chief of chiefs and Love of loves:  
be at the dawning of our days,  
be at the closing of our nights.**  
**O Chief of chiefs and Love of loves,  
consecrate us, heart and body,  
consecrate us body and soul.**  
**O chief of chiefs and Love of loves,  
consecrate us for Yourself,  
O God of all.  
Amen.**

## PRAYERS FOR OUR WORLD



*Almighty God, Creator and Father of all,  
we offer ourselves to you  
in this place made holy by your Spirit within us.  
Hear us as we bring to you in prayer the pain of the world.  
Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us :*

*We pray your healing, Lord, for the countries where some are intoxicated by war, but most are desperately weary of it – especially the Middle East.  
We pray for those who wake each morning to shellfire and destruction.  
For children dispossessed of childhood and transformed into soldiers.  
For orphans wandering lonely roads to uncertain futures.  
For each persecuted family carrying your cross.  
For each refugee trying to sing their song in a strange land.  
Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us and  
Hear our prayer*

*We pray for people across the world without food. The countries of Africa, where drought has brought famine and places such as Gaza and Afghanistan, where the pandemic has cut supply lines, bringing thousands to the brink of starvation. We pray for the swift financial intervention of wealthy and powerful nations and for the prioritising of policies of justice and care for the weakest.*

***Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us and  
Hear our prayer***

*Loving Lord, we thank you for the glory of Creation and your desire to reveal yourself through its diversity and magnificence. We thank you for all your creatures, filled with your presence and tender love. Teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe. All things speak of you. Show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all you have created.*

***Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us and  
Hear our prayer***

*We remember before you all who are suffering in body, mind or spirit. All are known to you, Lord, and we name before you now, those known to us .....*

*Grant them courage, strength and healing.*

***Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us and  
Hear our prayer***

*We pray eternal peace for those who have died and comfort for those who mourn*

*We also remember those family members whom we still miss and the friends, whose loss still saddens us. May your light shine on them forever and our lives be enriched by their memory.*

***Loving Lord, look with mercy upon us and  
Hear our prayer***

*Lord, make us a channel of your blessing. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that through our lives, our love and our prayer, we may bring wholeness to broken people and a broken world.*

***These prayers we humbly offer in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***Amen.***



**LORD'S PRAYER**  
*(The New Zealand Prayer Book)*

**Eternal Spirit,**

**Earth-maker, Pain bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;  
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;  
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on  
earth.**

**With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trial too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.  
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever.**

**Amen**

**BLESSING**

On our hearts and houses  
**The blessing of God.**  
In our coming and going  
**The peace of God.**  
In our life and believing  
**The love of God.**  
At our end and new beginning  
**The arms of God to welcome us  
and bring us home.**  
**Amen.**

