People from around the world will be able to 'join' in traditional worship at a church in London through Virtual Reality for the first time.

The Blessing of the Light, which draws on one of the ancient evening rituals of early Christianity, has been filmed in 3D in a trial new approach to online worship.

The seven-minute act of worship, filmed at the parish church of St Stephen Walbrook in the City of London, can be accessed on any computer or device, without special VR equipment.

People are able to experience 'standing' among the choir and can explore in 360-degree vision during the worship.

It is led by the Revd Tosin Oladipo, Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, with music from St Martin's Voices, the professional ensemble from St-Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

Amaris Cole, the Church of England's Head of Digital, said: "It's wonderful to be able to bring these ancient Christian prayers to a new audience who can be transported to St Stephen Walbrook for this service, wherever they might be in the world.

"Being able to produce innovative worship content like this in-house means we can continue to meet people where they are, on whatever device they might be using, with prayer and worship.

"Many people have connected with a local church over the course of the pandemic, joining online services and events.

"This technology offers the Church an exciting opportunity to go a step further and enable people to explore worship in our church buildings - perhaps for the first time."

The Blessing of the Light, which gives thanks for Christ the light of the world as well as for 'the lights of evening', draws its origins from the lucernarium or lamp-lighting ahead of evening prayer, thought to have been practised from early Christian times.
The Blessing of the Light will be launched on Facebook and the Church of England YouTube channel at 18:00.