

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *Rise up, rise up (repeat)*

130 MV (repeat)

Call to Worship

Arise, shine: for your light has come!

The glory of the Lord has risen upon us.

Lift up your eyes and look around!

We shall see and be radiant; our hearts shall rejoice.

For the Lord will be our everlasting light and our glory!

And so we bring God our worship in humble expectation.

† Prayer

God of light and of life, we praise you for your creation, and for the Word made flesh in the child born in Bethlehem. Open our hearts and minds in this time of worship. Just as you led the Magi by the star, lead us by your Spirit beyond the limits of this world's expectations, to the life where you make all things new through Christ, our Morning Star.

God of mercy and loving kindness, you sent Christ among us to be the light of the world and to reveal your love to all people. We confess that our sins hide the brightness of your light that should shine through us. We waste our gifts, we tune out cries for justice, we are careless with the earth and we do not strive as diligently as we might for peace in the world or with each other. In your mercy, hear our prayer... Amen

Words of Hope

Be assured of God's love and forgiveness that shine for us in Christ Jesus. As a new year unfolds, make a new beginning with God and with one another. May the peace of Christ be with you all.

➤ *Arise, your light is come*

712

† Prayer for Understanding

God of this season of light, we long to hear your Word and wisdom in fresh and transforming ways. Open our ears to your voice calling to us. Open our eyes to the dawning of a new day. Open our hearts to a new way of living, following Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture **Isaiah 60: 1-6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Matthew 2: 1-12

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 King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

There weren't three of them, they weren't kings, they didn't have camels, and we don't know they were men. When we hear the stories of Jesus' early life, it is almost impossible to look at a text apart from what we think we know about it. For most of us, the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke are entwined with one another and their Hebrew scripture roots. In Matthew, the Magi come to a house in Bethlehem – no manger, no shepherds, no heavenly host. Three gifts are named: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In Isaiah 60, gold, frankincense, and camels are listed among the tribute of nations and kings. In Psalm 72, kings bring gifts to Israel's king and fall down before him.

While we retain the details of wealth and power described in these passages – kings, camels, gold, honour – we often lose the theme of justice that pervades Isaiah and is explicit in the Psalm: *for he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.*

When we peel away the surplus meaning and focus on justice and power, the real gift of the mysterious and exotic visitors is revealed for us. W. H. Auden puts it perfectly and concisely in his poem For the Time Being: *To discover how to be human now / is the reason we follow this star.*

It happened in the time of King Herod, a time of great injustice and suffering. Herod was that most dangerous kind of powerful person: insecure and fearful, eaten up with worry about maintaining his power and place and comfort, his unearned advantages – his privilege. Protecting all of those things demands a lot of energy. Just imagine, how thrilled he must have been when a little band of travelers showed up at his palace – camels parked out front, loaded down with treasure – and they asked him – the king – for directions to the real King of the Jews?

Matthew's gospel says that Herod is frightened and all Jerusalem with him – but many translations read perturbed – troubled – disturbed. The king is disturbed by these wise guys! And the people are agitated because it is never good for the common folk when a king is upset.

We can understand Herod's anxiety. He has built himself a comfortable kingdom that works for him. Things are in place – orderly and comfortable – just the way Herod has arranged them. He is king after all and the thought of some other king who might threaten to disturb things – well you can see how a king could get perturbed about that.

Herod gathers his scholars to discover where this king is to be born since it seems the travelers – learned as they were – did not have all the answers – needed help on their long and hope-filled quest. They had dropped everything – left their country and the comforts of home to set out for a distant land. Their guide was a spectacular natural phenomenon – a bright star – but that star had only led them most of the way – not quite all the way – to this newborn king.

Where does one expect to find a newborn king? Well, in addition to the bright star in the sky, the wise men also had some knowledge of scripture to guide them – like today's beautiful words

from the prophet Isaiah spoken to the people of Israel more than five hundred years before these wise men set out on their journey. Based on Isaiah, they assumed that Jerusalem was the place to find the new king. To Jerusalem they carried their gifts just as the dream of Isaiah had the wealth of the nations coming to the bright shining city. And when they got there, they innocently – naively – turned to Herod the lesser, evil king, for directions to the real king promised by God.

Herod reacts in fear to the birth of a baby king destined to replace him – one who brings good news for the world. For Herod, this is bad news, and he turns to the chief priests and scribes, to help him figure out where this dangerous child is. Herod is disturbed and all Jerusalem with him.

The scholars do a little Bible study and instead of Isaiah they bring to Herod a surprising, counter-intuitive, and maybe even dangerous answer from two other books of the Old Testament: the prophet Micah and the second book of Samuel. These texts say that the one who is to rule – the gentle shepherd king – will come from the most unexpected of places, off the beaten path, out of the limelight – the little town of Bethlehem.

Our story – the one that comes to us in Matthew's gospel, is really about those two Old Testament stories: one about a great and prosperous city and one about a humble little town. Jerusalem and Bethlehem are only nine miles apart, but what a long nine miles from the halls of power and glory – to what God is doing out there on the margins.

One account offers a grand vision of self-sufficiency and normalcy – security that we're tempted to seek through power – the power of money – possessions – misinformation – weapons.

The other offers an alternative that runs throughout the entire Bible: a dream of peace and a time when all nations will beat their swords into plowshares and live together in harmony – when the lion and the lamb will lie down together because nature itself will embody a whole new way of being – no more deaths of innocents – no violence or wretched injustice. The way of Jesus is vulnerability – neighborliness – generosity – *delivering the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.*

We have followed the star with the wise men and arrived with them to find Jesus on the margins – Jesus, who challenges our comfort and disturbs our carefully organized life. So, what now? Will we simply pack this Bethlehem shepherd king away with the Christmas decorations and lights, and assign them to the musty cupboard till next Advent?

The mystical magi are knocking at the door. They speak of stars and destiny, and a guide and king who offers an alternative path leading us to God. Will we allow them to disturb us enough that we might join their caravan of change? Will we follow the star to discover how to be human now? **Amen**

† Offering and Prayer

Epiphany opens with the story of the Magi offering gifts to the new-born king. Our gifts today and throughout the year honour Jesus as Lord of our lives and Saviour of the world. We may not bring gold, frankincense and myrrh, but all our gifts are welcome to keep the light of Christ shining into the world.

God of majesty and mystery, we bring our gifts to you, grateful that you are with us in good times and in hard times. We do not know what the year ahead will hold but your love shines like a star to guide us. Bless these gifts that they may keep the light of Christ shining through the church to guide and embrace the world you love. Amen

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

➤ *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*

542

Gathering at the Lord's Table

Laura The table of the Lord is to be made ready. It is the table of companionship with Jesus and all who love him and all who want to love him more. It is the table of sharing with the poor and broken. It is the table of relationship, in which Christ becomes flesh.

Peter We come seeking strength and healing. We come seeking unity with Christ.

Laura Come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have been here often, and you have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed.

Peter Come to the table – all are welcome. Christ invites us to meet him here.

Laura The Lord be with you.

ALL *And also with you.*

Laura Lift up your hearts.

ALL *We lift them to the Lord.*

Laura Let us give thanks to our Creator God.

ALL *It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

Laura Gracious God, we praise you – giving thanks to you with our lips and our lives. Through the words of your prophets you gave your people hope by promising them the Redeemer. And now we rejoice that in your Son, Jesus Christ, the Saviour has come and will come again in power and glory making all things new.

Peter When we were nothing, you made us something. When we had no name and no faith and no future – you called us your children...

Laura When we lost our way, or turned away, you did not abandon us. In Jesus the Word became flesh, giving us a vision of your glory that all people might be brought out of darkness into your marvelous light.

Peter When we came back to you, your arms opened wide in welcome. You prepare a table for us – offering, not just bread, not just wine – but your very self so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed, blessed and made new again.

Laura And so with the all the faithful throughout time, and the angels in the heavens, we sing with joy...

ALL *O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!*

Peter We remember the one who came because words were not enough. For us you were born... for us you healed, preached, taught and showed the way to heaven; and for us, after death, you rose again.

Laura We give you thanks, O God that on the night of his arrest Jesus sat down to eat with friends. During the meal, he took bread, said a prayer, broke it and shared it with everyone at the table, saying: *"This is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."*

At the end of the meal, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying: *"This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me."*

Gracious God, following Jesus' example, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world, which Christ makes special. We know that with you is mercy and the power to change us. Therefore, we proclaim the mystery of faith...

ALL *Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!*

Laura Hear us, O Lord, and breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine. May they be for us your body – vibrant with your life, renewing and making us whole. As the bread and wine which we now eat and drink are changed into us, may we be changed again into you – bone of your bone – flesh of your flesh, loving and caring in the world.

ALL **In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...**

ALL ***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen! Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

Sharing Bread and Wine

The one who was first held by Mary, is held for us in this bread.

The one whose body was laid in a manger, is cradled in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

Everyone consumes the elements in their own space...

† Prayer

Most holy God, you led people from far away, to find the mystery unveiled in Christ Jesus. May we, who have come from even further away, never take your revelation for granted. Keep alive in our hearts wonder and praise – make us eager to share that light with everyone, without exception.

We give thanks, O God, for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. We ask your blessing as we seek to serve you willingly and cheerfully, affirming your command and desire that we love one another. During this time of silence, we name in our hearts those for whom we crave your healing touch...

Holy One be to each of us inner warmth and light. Bless all whose hands reach out to others this day. We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus who encourages us to taste and see the wonders of your grace and in whose name we sing together....

➤ *Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats)* 469

Blessing

The Light has pierced our darkness. Go in the name of God - Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, to follow that light. And may the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *We will go out with joy*

539 (PCUSA)