

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. We commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

Call to Worship

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 rulers to the brightness of your dawn.

Let us worship the living God!

➤ *Gathered in the love of Christ (chorus only – repeated) attached*

† Prayer

God of power and might, God of grace and mercy, heaven and earth are full of your glory. You chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ, sharing our joys and sorrows, displaying your greatness in the child of the manger. We praise you for your amazing love, great enough to embrace the expanding universe, yet close enough to enter our humble hearts.

During this time worship, surprise us with your grace once again, that we, with the whole Church and your precious creation, may praise and honour your holy name, O God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

God of goodness and guidance, In Christ you sent us light to live by, yet sometimes we seek shadows in which to hide. In him, you promise new life, but sometimes we cling to our old habits, nursing grievances and clinging to familiar opinions. Remake us in the image of your Son with your mercy and teach us how to follow Christ in the year ahead.

† Words of Hope

Let us sing a new song unto the Lord! Sing his praise through out the world. And let us not be afraid, for God says to us: I have redeemed you; you are mine. I have set you as a seal on my heart. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. In Jesus Christ we have seen the love of God, and we know that we are forgiven people. Thanks be to God for such grace.

➤ *We three kings*

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† Prayer for Understanding

Gracious and Loving God we come to you, seeking the light of your face and the surprises of your grace. By the power of your Holy Spirit, open to us the treasures of your love and your wisdom. Encourage what you have begun in each of us through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Scripture

Isaiah 60:1-6 [OT 690]

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 [NT 2]

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 ***Epiphany – Hitting the Pause Button***

On this second Sunday after Christmas and Epiphany Sunday we remember how the wisemen or Magi arrived to worship Jesus. This is a day when we take one step back from everything we've experienced this Christmas, kind of like hitting the pause button before we pack away all the Christmas decorations. As we look back at the gifts of the Advent season, we see the gifts that paved our way to the Christ child in the manger. We began our journey with Hope and looked at the message of the prophets and then we lit the candle of Peace and realized that the peace that comes from God is much more than just the absence of conflict. God's peace comes in the midst of our chaos. It even comes in the midst of a pandemic when people are feeling lost and isolated. Our journey then took us to light the candle of Joy and we were reminded that Christmas is not always a joyful time. Many of us are remembering people who are no longer with us and it's hard to smile and be joyful. But joy, like peace and hope, comes from God. It is times like these that it has been important for us to come together even if it was online this past year for a Blue Christmas service. And our final stop before we arrived at the manger was to light the candle of love for Christmas is seen as the ultimate gift of Jesus when love came down at Christmas. Finally, as we gather the gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love we were all set to arrive at the manger on Christmas Day or really anytime we were able to set aside that time to come to worship Jesus. Sometimes our Christmas gets so hectic that we don't get that opportunity to meet at the manger but today Epiphany Sunday we get to hit the pause button and like the wisemen so long ago we can come to worship Jesus with gratitude and love.

In our home we have a nativity set that we purchased in Jerusalem while we were visiting in the Holy Land that is made from olive wood. Every year we set it up and we always leave the wisemen a distance away from the nativity until Epiphany arrives which this year is Thursday. Every year I always notice usually after our grandchildren have left that the cast of characters have been moved around. This year was no exception. This year I noticed that the wisemen who hadn't arrived yet were brought into the manger by our grandchildren. I remember years ago a friend telling me that her grandchild had brought a toy car into the manger for Mary so she wouldn't have to ride on the donkey. The imagination of children shows us adults that they really are thinking these stories through.

As we approach the gospel according to Matthew this morning, we will notice how Matthew has woven the story of the arrival of the Magi with the ancient biblical stories. As he tells about the journey of the Magi he brings to mind the stories of God's promises to God's people in the words of Isaiah that we heard read today: 'Arise, shine; for your light has come' and he claimed that other nations would be drawn to the glory of our God too. Matthew uses the words of the prophet Micah as a backdrop 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers for Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who is a shepherd my people Israel.'

We see in this story how the magi not only searched for Jesus, but they also protected him. This is vitally important to understand about the role of the magi in Matthew's gospel. They are responsible for keeping Herod away from the child and enabling his family to shuffle him undercover to Egypt for the next few years until the death of Herod.

It seems that many around the Jewish territory understood what was going on in Jerusalem, understood the political and spiritual implications of the birth of this newborn king, and they understood the religious meaning behind the birth of Jesus, and they came to honour and protect this newborn child.

By the time the magi saw the constellations that led them to make this long journey to Jerusalem in Judah, by the time they did their rounds with Herod, by the time they set off again in the direction of Bethlehem, and by the time they found the child, the child Jesus was in a house along with his mother, and he was probably at least a year old.

There they presented the child and his mother with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold for the journeying and raising of the child, frankincense for incense (which was also an anti-inflammatory and protects against infection), and myrrh for healing of wounds. All of these were care and protective agents to ensure the life of the child. Many children died young in those days. They needed to make sure this one was kept well. These were valuable and practical gifts to ensure the well-being of a child. For the magi were not only philosophers but healers, natural healers, who understood the medicinal properties of herbs and stones, spices and oils.

In everything they did, the magi protected Jesus. Finally, warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

What we know about the Magi is that they played a key role in protecting and guarding the life of the infant messiah, the Jewish messiah, for whom they had great hopes for that nation and the world at large.

Today, the magi have an even more important lesson for us: that knowledge lies far beyond what we can see with our eyes and understand with facts and figures. Intuition, signs, mysteries, prophecies –these begin with faith in God, the God who came down among us as the Emmanuel.

As we hit that pause button today, we are reminded never to underestimate the power of your faith, your spiritual discernment, your prayers, and your meditations. These are your gateways to true wisdom and knowledge of Christ. We are urged to be the “magi” of our day. We are to study the scriptures, seek to understand the ways of God, engage in daily prayer, meditation, and solitude. We are to take part in worship, praise, and thanksgiving. Every once in a while in our journey we have to step back and pause and look around and see where we are and where we want to be or where God needs us to be. Are we going in the right direction?

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank the session and the congregation for allowing me the privilege of being the pastoral visitor for the past 3 years. I am at the end of the 3-year contract, and I am very thankful to all the people I have met and journeyed with as part of my journey as pastoral visitor. So, I say thank you and look forward to the future for you and myself as both us find new ways to shine God’s love with those that we meet.

There is a story that Robert Fulghum tells about attending a conference in Greece where he heard a powerful lecturer. Everybody was thrilled about what the lecturer had said. Toward the end of the lecture, the speaker asked, "Are there any questions?" There was just awestruck silence. Nobody said a word. It was one of those special moments when words failed. But Fulghum, always the jokester, said, "I've got a question! In the five minutes we have left, tell us the meaning of life?" Everybody laughed and started to gather up their things to leave. But the lecturer said, "Wait a moment; sit down...because I do want to tell you the meaning of life...." The lecturer removed from his wallet a tiny round mirror about the size of a quarter. He told the story of how, as a child during WWII, he'd lived in tremendous poverty. One day he was walking down the road and he saw the wreckage of a motorcycle. In that wreckage was a cracked mirror.

He said, "I tried to gather up all the pieces of that mirror and put it back together again, but I couldn't find all the pieces, so I took the biggest piece and by scratching it on a stone, I made it round. It became for me a wonderful toy. My fun was to reflect the light of the sun into the darkest places I could find. Whenever I would get bored, I would pull out that little mirror, and I would reflect the sun into places where the light had never, ever been." He added, "As I grew up, that act became a metaphor of what I could do with my life." "I'm not the light," he said. "I'm a reflector of the light, and my job is to get light into the darkest of places." As we hit that pause button today let us take on the task of spreading light into the darkest places and become the Magi of our day.

Let us pray: *Gracious God, we thank you today for the gift of your Son and the gift of the Magi in our lives, those who have searched us out and have walked beside us and protected us in uncertain times. Walk with us and help us to shine your light around us for those who need to see your light in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

➤ ***As with gladness men of old*** **172**

† Offering Invitation

The season of Epiphany begins January 6, the day celebrating the journey of the Magi to greet Christ, the new-born king. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Our gifts are not so exotic, but what we offer today and throughout the year honours Jesus as Lord of our lives and Saviour of the world. Let us present to God our offerings.

➤ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** **306**

† Offering Prayer

God of majesty and mystery, we bring our gifts to you, grateful that you are with us in good times and 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 offer the world truth and wisdom, healing and hope in Jesus' name. Amen.

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of grace and healing, shine your light upon us – Into those places of conflict and tension in our families, in our friendships, in our work and community relationships. May your light be a healing balm, bringing with it forgiveness and reconciliation. God of connection; Shine your light upon us – Onto the common human ties that bind all of your people together: Neighbour and stranger, friend and enemy alike. In your light, remind us that you have created all of us in your image, unique and beloved by you.

God of power and mercy, shine your light upon our nation and its leaders That they may govern justly and wisely. Taking into account the needs and concerns not just of the most wealthy and powerful, But especially of those who are poor, those who struggle with physical and mental illness, those who fear for their families because of financial hardship or immigration status, those who are feeling forgotten and forsaken.

God of compassion and peace, shine your light on all the places around the world where violence and unrest and war are happening, here at home, in places we hear about in the news, and in places we cannot name or do not know. With your light bring peace to those who languish In fear, violence and despair.

God of goodness, we thank you for the light that shines – The light that we see in the glory and wonder of your creation, and in the beauty that surrounds us. Thank you for the light that shines through this community and its members, young and old, who remind us of your presence in tears and laughter, teaching and learning, order and disruption, work and play.

Shine your light upon us. And around us, and within us, that we, too may be a light to the world. Hear us now as we join together to pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to say... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen***

➤ ***Lord, the light of your love is shining*** **376**

Blessing

May the light of gospel of Christ, shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world. And now – may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, abide with you, this day and always. Amen.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)*** **622**