

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. I don't know the full story of its history but continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

Celebrations / Joys & Concerns

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

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary*

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 worship God in humble expectation.

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Living God, you are the shining light that shows us our way, the life that makes all things live, the joy that makes the whole universe good. Help us to recognize you everywhere. Open our senses to find you in unlikely places and open our hearts to welcome you in this place.

Forgive us, gracious God, when we hoard your love for ourselves and deny it to others – when we fail to cherish the generous gift of your wisdom sent to guide us, to lead us, and to rescue us. Forgive us, when we do not recognize in each person your beloved child. Forgive us and lead us back to the shelter of your embrace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

No one has ever seen God – yet Jesus, God's own child, has revealed God to us. We have seen Christ's glory, full of grace and truth. Know, therefore, that your sins are forgiven.

□ *What child is this*

161

Dramatic Reading

The Journey of the Magi by T.S. Eliot – with musical accompaniment by S. Sturgess

Prayer for Understanding

God of light and life, we seek your wisdom to guide us into this new year. Open our ears to your Word calling to us. Open our eyes to your Word at work in the world. Open our hearts to renew our commitment to follow Christ, your living Word. 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.

Ephesians 3: 1-12 [NT 193]

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

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

The day of Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas, is celebrated on January 6th, and we celebrate a day late in our worship this morning. Epiphany – the realization of who the baby Jesus is by the Magi is their Epiphany – and we try to celebrate our own epiphanies – the moment or moments in our lives when we finally realize who Jesus is to us and what he means in our lives.

Epiphany is from a Greek word which means *coming to light or in full view*. It is a sudden realization of the truth about something – the light bulb shining bright, an "A–Ha" moment when all the pieces fall into place and comprehension is achieved. Epiphany means the sudden awareness, the unexpected appreciation that God is in Christ – that God dwells in the baby Jesus. Epiphany is the moment of recognition.

Epiphany is also a celebration of light. We understand the light of our lives to be Jesus Christ. Today we read of the Magi seeing the light of the star of Bethlehem and using

that to discover Jesus. The gospel of John opens with... *what has come into being through him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* But even as we understand that Jesus is the light, we also hear in scriptures that we are the light. In Matthew's account of Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount, we read of Jesus saying, *you are the light of the world... Let your light shine before others.* Epiphany is about light – the light of Christ that has come into the world to dwell with us and within us.

Epiphany – coming to light – what is coming to light today – within us? Sure, we can understand the idea of a spiritual epiphany, a religious awakening of sorts, but our gospel today is about the visit of the Magi or wise men to the Christ child. How did they come to this pilgrimage and what do we really know about their experience? Why is it even significant?

It all happened a very long time ago when Herod was king and after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Putting the wise men in the nativity scene is likely stretching things considerably. They probably started on their quest at the time of Jesus' birth and came to Jerusalem a year or two later to find the child born "king of the Jews."

In fact, Matthew is not the first one to imagine some rich wise guys from the East coming to Jerusalem. His story line and plot come from Isaiah 60 – a poem recited to Jews in Jerusalem about 580 B.C.E. These people had been in exile in Iraq for a couple of generations and had come back to the bombed-out city of Jerusalem. They were in despair. Who wants to live in a city where the towers are torn down and the economy has failed, and nobody knows what to do about it?

In the middle of the mess, an amazing poet invites his depressed, discouraged contemporaries to look up, to hope and to expect everything to change. *Rise, shine, for your light has come.* The poet anticipates that Jerusalem will become a beehive of productivity and prosperity, a new center of international trade. *Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...* Caravans loaded with trade goods will come from Asia and bring prosperity. This is cause for celebration. God has promised to make the city work effectively in peace, and a promise from God is very sure.

Like Matthew, the wise men know about Isaiah 60 and the promise of a new king bringing peace and prosperity. Maybe that is why they go to Jerusalem, taking with them precious gifts. Perhaps that is where our image of camels in the manger comes from. Maybe they go to Jerusalem first to connect with King Herod – it makes sense that another king in the area would know about this new royalty, right? But when Herod entertains his foreign guests, he is frightened. A new king is a threat to the old king and the old order.

Herod feigns benevolent interest in the child, encouraging the Magi to bring word when they find him so that Herod can also go and pay him homage. We know that this can

only mean trouble and are relieved to hear of the warning dream that the Magi experience – comforted to learn that they head for home on another path, far from Herod's reach.

The thing is that Isaiah 60 is really the wrong text. The wise men are quoting from the prophet Micah: *But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah . . . from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old...* Micah anticipates a leader who will bring well-being to his people, not by great political ambition, but by attentiveness to those on the ground – the common people.

We don't always lean toward the less glamorous, grassroots notions of Micah – we even embellish the story as Matthew told it. The wise men become more than nameless strangers engaged in the study of astrology in our unscriptural retelling. Suddenly they are kings, and they are given the names of royalty from the corners of the known world – Melchior of Persia, Gaspar of India, and Balthasar of Arabia. Why three? Likely because three gifts are presented – gold and frankincense and myrrh – but the text doesn't say three kings.

We have tended to idealize and romanticize the story as we tell and retell it, and in so doing have perhaps neglected its more obvious meaning. The visit of the wise men is significant not because these visitors were royal, or mysterious, or astrologers, or because they brought Jesus precious, symbolic gifts. The reason these wise men are important in Matthew's eyes, is because they are not Jews – they are Gentiles. They are the first Gentiles to see God in the baby Jesus, the first non-Jews to have the Epiphany experience – to recognize the divine identity of Jesus.

And that recognition is important to us because it is the opening of the doors. The people of Israel have known for a very long time that they are God's chosen, special people. But in Jesus – Emmanuel – the table is widened and extended – the message is surely for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles – the whole world can receive God in a special way now that God has come in person. This is the brilliant lightbulb, the great "A-Ha" that Epiphany shares with us.

The Journey of the Magi, which Steve presented, is a poem by T. S. Eliot written after Eliot's conversion to Christianity and confirmation in the Church of England in 1927. The poem is an account of the journey from the point of view of one Magi – a speaker who laments outliving his world. It's also generally considered to be a deeply personal poem – conveying Eliot's view that spiritual transformation is not a comfort, but an ongoing process – an arduous journey seemingly without end.

The poem is a complaint about a journey that was painful and tedious. The speaker says that a voice was always whispering in their ears as they went that *this was all folly*. The one telling the tale seems generally unimpressed by the infant yet realizes that the incarnation has changed everything.

In the monologue, the man has made his own choice – has achieved belief in the incarnation – but is still part of that life which Jesus comes to sweep away. He cannot break loose from the past. The Birth that is also Death seems not to have brought him hope of a new life but revealed to him the hopelessness of his previous life. The speaker's view on the birth of Jesus – and the shift from the old ways to Christianity – is complex and ambivalent.

Throughout the poem there are allegorical reminders of what the birth of Jesus means: the valley of life – the three crosses of Calvary – the White Horse of the Second Coming. There are allusions to the Communion – the paschal lamb whose blood was smeared on the lintels of Israel – the blood money of Judas – the insults suffered by Christ before the Crucifixion – the soldiers casting lots at the foot of the Cross – even the pilgrims at the open tomb in the garden.

The birth of the Christ was the death of the world of magic, astrology, and paganism. The speaker in Eliot's poem, recalling his journey, says that after that birth his world had died – they returned to their kingdoms no longer at ease in the old dispensation. The speaker has reached the end of one world, but despite his acceptance of the revelation as valid, he struggles to enter a world not his own.

Were they led there for Birth or for Death – to make a choice between Birth and Death? Can one happen without the other?

The birth of the Christ is the death of one way of being – it is the end of resting comfortably in the old dispensation. Like Eliot, when we come to know who Jesus is, we realize that the incarnation changes everything...

Recognizing the divine identity of Jesus – knowing that God is in Christ and that Christ is in us, renovates our world entirely. Our way of being in a world where God dwells among us and seeks to shine forth from us is not about security and prosperity but about vulnerability, neighbourliness, and generosity – a modest future with spears turned into pruning hooks and swords into ploughshares. The question becomes how we respond to that transformation. Can we willingly and joyfully accept discipleship? Will we succumb to the Herod within ourselves – resisting God's power in our lives – or can we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed with joy? Can we kneel before Jesus offering our treasure – dying to our life of privilege and embracing God's promise of new life? Can we go home by another road?

□ *We three kings*

173

Offering and Prayer

Epiphany opens with the story of the Magi offering gifts to the newborn 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 always with us. 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 embrace the world you love. Amen

The Apostles' Creed

539

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

Invitation to the Lord's Table (adapted from Jerie Lukefahr)

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. The prophet gave us many names to use when we speak of Jesus.

Friend. Disciple. Neighbour. Beloved. Jesus gives us many names to use when we speak of each other.

Communion. Eucharist. Heavenly banquet. The Lord's Supper. This meal is known by many names, but only one person prepares it, and invites us to partake of it, and that is Christ, our brother, our saviour and our friend.

We are never closer to Christ than when we gather here together. The invitation is for each of us: all who are faithful – all who doubt. All who are fearful – all who are strong.

Come to the table – it may be familiar, or it may be brand new to you. This table does not belong to the church, it belongs to Jesus Christ – and it is he who invites everyone to share in the bread of life and the cup of grace. Come share this joyful feast.

† Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving (from *enfleshed*)

The Holy One be with you

And also with you

Open your hearts to the One who is Love

We open our hearts to you, O God

Let us give thanks to God with us

To the One who took on flesh, we give thanks and praise

Creator of all that is, Mother of life itself, by your hand we were formed. You made us relational. You created us to thrive – not alone, but together. You shaped the entire cosmos so that every form of life depends on another. You never intended for us to power through these lives alone. You made us strong and resilient people, but equally vulnerable and dependent on you, the earth, and all our neighbors.

You gifted us with the need to rely on one another, bone of each other's bone, flesh of each other's flesh. In your wisdom, you created us with both desire and need to be in community. Therefore, we join our voices with your people on earth and all the company of the heavens, singing praise to you...

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!

In our longing for your presence with us, we often expect your arrival in traditional places of power. We seek our hope and salvation in the false promises of dominance and might. But instead, you brought us salvation through vulnerability. You too became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. God, in the form of a baby, you made yourself dependent on us. An infant, revealing the transformative power of giving and receiving love through human flesh.

Throughout the life of Jesus, we saw lives transformed by your willingness to make yourself vulnerable. And yet, that same vulnerability also came at a price. Though some fed you and raised you and befriended you, others persecuted you to the point of death. Seeking to eradicate their own feelings of vulnerability, those in power preyed on yours.

Still, today, we often crucify the ones who dare to risk it all on love.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples, saying: *"This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying: *"This cup that is poured out is the new covenant."*

In remembrance of all you have done to save us, we proclaim the mystery of our faith...

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

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

Pour out your Spirit on these gifts, O God. Give us a taste of resurrection hope that lasts through even the most challenging of relational betrayals. Meet us in this bread and this cup – hear the prayers of your people in this aching world. Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

In collective longing for a taste of your Kindom on earth, we join together singing...

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

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

Sharing Bread and Cup

*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.*

In these gifts God comes to us so that we may come to God.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving.

Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.

If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.

We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Juice, wine, and pre-packaged elements are available.

Closing 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 the wonder and blessing of the incarnation – 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 teaches us to pray together, singing...

☐ ***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.

May the light of God lead you, the light of Christ embrace you, and the light of the Holy Spirit enliven you so that you know both hope and peace this day and each coming day.

☐ ***Arise, your light is come***

712

The Journey of the Magi [by T. S. Eliot]

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires gong out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty, and charging high prices.:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the
darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we lead all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt.
I have seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.