



# EPIPHANY

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2020

### CHANGING THE WORLD AND BEING CHANGED



He Qi – The Magi – the so-called, Three Wise Men

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, western Christians celebrate the feast of Epiphany, which takes its name from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, meaning disclosure, unveiling. Epiphany really stands as the highpoint of Christmas: it looks forward to the mission of the Christian church, couched in terms of Jesus as the light of the world, and understood as the priority given to outsiders, to those on the margins. In New Testament times, these were the Gentiles, the non-Jews who were considered as outside any possibility of ‘salvation’. So, Epiphany has to do with the Gospel’s capacity to overcome boundaries: religious, social, economic and political. This is quite a claim and one which often runs counter to experience, as Christianity has had a muddled reputation at times, for generating conflict. Epiphany is a reminder to the Church of its vocation, which requires intelligence and imagination in the application of the Gospel, so that the faith serves constructive purposes. Equally, Epiphany is about being changed. In other words, just as the Church is a changing agent in the world, the Church itself is called to be changed.

For the Catholic church, Epiphany is just one day, January 6<sup>th</sup>, while the period after Epiphany through till Lent is considered as part of what the church calendar refers to as “ordinary time”. For the Protestant tradition, however, we continue after the Day of Epiphany, on January 6<sup>th</sup>, with the “Season of Epiphany”, spending time thinking through the meaning of mission and evangelization in the modern world: that is certainly the emphasis of the Uniting Church.

## OUR GATHERING

### We Prepare

**The Lord is my Light and Salvation: Taizé, Jacques Berthier**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFUJi7xmlnc>

### Welcome

In the name of Father  
and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with

***And also with you***

**Hymn: Angels from the realms of glory (TiS 309, Iris, James Montgomery)**

### Our Prayers for Journeying

No one has the right to make Christianity boring, although the Church does a good job of it, reducing the faith to unimaginative and often legalistic rule-following. This was an insight of the Hebrew prophets and clearly, Jesus himself. It is also the main point of the Russian author, Fyodor Dostoevsky in the chapter "The Grand Inquisitor" in his work *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is a wonderful read. In this prayer, in keeping with the ethos of Epiphany, I attempt to underscore the adventurous-ness of Christian existence, not its 'ho-hum-ness'

Where will our journey take,  
we travellers?

Into what vistas of discovery will our breath exhale?

***What textures of wisdom, sharp or smooth,  
will touch our skin?***

What light will draw our eyes through  
each day's doorway?

We have been searchers, felt yearnings,  
felt the power and pull of the unknown  
sometimes fleeing, sometimes facing  
its challenges and fears.

We have travelled alone in hope and ambition,  
joined caravans of curiosity and fad.

***We cannot see where the journey leads, but our yearnings  
compel us, and we go.***

Come into this tent, traveller.

Come join  
this caravan of pilgrims.

***There are other travellers here, seekers like ourselves.***

Called wise by some –  
though they have known other titles –  
they are the ancestors of all who journey  
for wisdom,  
for understanding, for experience of something  
or someone  
they might name God.

They have crossed deserts and rivers,  
inhaled the scent of wild grasses,  
the perfume of strange blossoms,  
tasted the dust of roads of sorrow  
upon their tongues.

***Their minds are open to possibility, to discovery,  
they have watched the fresh sky,  
they have scanned the old Scriptures,  
they dared the deep questions,  
persevering in the journey***

until they found One they believed was  
their destination:

One for whom prophecies had been written,  
for whom new stars had shined,  
toward whom their roads had long been bending.

But let us listen to the message of the Magi,  
fellow travellers:

the journey is not done.

The Child  
will grow, will beckon to newer ways  
and to lifelong following.

***Finding this One is but a beginning, an awakening,  
an opening up of greater doors,  
an invitation to horizons, farther roads***

***that lead to greater understanding –***  
 and to greater challenges,  
 fresher questions,  
 and quite possibly to the kind of joy  
 that outlasts dusty grief.

Come into this tent, traveller.  
 Let us join  
 this caravan of pilgrims,  
***follow the One who has given us the journey,  
 grow on his paths as they lead through the year***

*Inspired by Andrew King, Maple Grove United Church, Oakville, Ontario, Canada*

## **The Peace**

### **Introduction**

As mentioned on the first page of today's liturgy, Epiphany and the period following is when the Church focuses upon mission, the concept of evangelization. We often think that it is the Church that is in charge of its own mission. While that is partly true, it is also true to say that Christian mission determines the Church: it is a two-way street. Mission involves a process of listening to the Spirit of God which speaks through the Church *but also from outside of it*, from beyond her. Today, to actually take this seriously is a big ask, as the Church feels increasingly misunderstood and marginalised by broader society. This has been put in terms of a conflict between secularism and faith. We would do well to be careful about such constructs, for God's world is broader than the Church, or the people of God. We need to think expansively, broadly, generously, always in a spirit of openness and generosity for this is God's world not just ours.

## **LET'S HEAR THE WORD**

### **Some Anecdotal Insights about Christian Mission in the World**

As an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes "the rest," which is 'given in addition.'...[T]his great gift of God,...is liberation from everything that oppresses people, but... is above all, liberation from sin and brokenness. All of this began during the life of Christ and definitively accomplished by His death and resurrection. But it must be patiently carried on during the course of

history. **Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* – “On Evangelization in the Modern World”, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975**

The *magi* who travelled long and hard to worship Jesus with extravagant gifts remind us that He is not only the King of the Jews; he's the King of all nations and peoples. In contrast to our propensity to privilege one ethnicity or people (usually "mine") over another, to view one's own people as exceptional to God and others as at best unexceptional, and to exclude other people who are different (usually "yours"), the pagans from Persia show that God welcomes the worship and the gifts of all people everywhere. **Daniel B. Clendenin**

**Isaiah 60:1-6 (Good News translation)**

Caroline Turner

The feast of Epiphany is associated with the visit of the wise men from the east who, in the Gospel of Matthew, came to Judea in search of the new born king of the Jews. It is also understandable that the Old Testament reading set for Epiphany is Isa 60.1-6 which begins 'Arise, shine; for your light has come', and continues telling of the glory of the Lord coming upon the people. Lots of light and plenty of 'seeing' fill this passage. This text comes from Third Isaiah, Isaiah 56-66, a set of texts usually dated to soon after the return of the exiles from Babylon in the late 6th century BCE. In that context, radiance, thrill and joy (v. 5) are understandable. Verses 1-3 is a general summons to the city to arise and shine, for the Lord is rising on Zion (like the sun). Verses 4-9 then describe the coming of the nations, who are mainly pictured in this section as Zion's children (vv. 4, 9), as they pour into Zion (v. 5; cf. Isa 2:2-4). Verses 10-16 focus much more on the foreigners who will come to Zion and who will serve the returned exiles. We read only vs 1-6.

Arise, Jerusalem, and shine like the sun;  
 The glory of the LORD is shining on you!  
<sup>2</sup> Other nations will be covered by darkness,  
 But on you the light of the LORD will shine;  
 The brightness of his presence will be with you.  
<sup>3</sup> Nations will be drawn to your light,  
 And kings to the dawning of your new day.  
<sup>4</sup> Look around you and see what is happening:  
 Your people are gathering to come home!  
 Your sons will come from far away;  
 Your daughters will be carried like children.  
<sup>5</sup> You will see this and be filled with joy;  
 You will tremble with excitement.  
 The wealth of the nations will be brought to you;  
 From across the sea their riches will come.

<sup>6</sup> Great caravans of camels will come, from Midian and Ephah.  
They will come from Sheba, bringing gold and incense.  
People will tell the good news of what the LORD has done!

The word of the Lord  
***Thanks be to God***

**Psalm 72 (Good News translation)**

Caroline Turner

Psalm 72 is a royal psalm, possibly originally part of a coronation liturgy. It has the added function of closing Book II of the book of Psalms. The psalm is an intercessory prayer for the king. In Ps 72:1-4, there is particular concern for 'the poor' (cf. vv. 12-14). The king's reign is seen as an avenue of God's blessing, especially on those who are in most need. This is the first request for the king. Such blessing is in the context of a three-way relationship: king-people and king-Yahweh. The king receives justice from Yahweh which he then exercises in his reign with the people. The continuity of order in the world is set up by Yahweh and conveyed through the political structures. The second request for the king is that he may live long and be like the rain that falls on mown grass and the showers that water earth (v. 6), i.e. bring prosperity and peace in his reign. This section of the psalm (vv. 5-7; cf. vv. 15-17) develops the fertility language of the ancient Near East. What the king establishes here is made possible first by God's eternal authority in the cosmos.

- Teach the king to judge with your righteousness, O God;  
share with him your own justice,  
<sup>2</sup> ***so that he will rule over your people with justice  
and govern the oppressed with righteousness.***  
<sup>3</sup> May the land enjoy prosperity;  
may it experience righteousness.  
<sup>4</sup> ***May the king judge the poor fairly;  
may he help the needy  
and defeat their oppressors.***  
<sup>5</sup> May your people worship you as long as the sun shines,  
as long as the moon gives light, for ages to come.  
<sup>6</sup> ***May the king be like rain on the fields,  
like showers falling on the land.***  
<sup>7</sup> May righteousness flourish in his lifetime,  
and may prosperity last as long as the moon gives light.  
<sup>8</sup> His kingdom will reach from sea to sea,  
from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.  
<sup>9</sup> The peoples of the desert will bow down before him;  
his enemies will throw themselves to the ground.  
<sup>10</sup> **The kings of Spain and of the islands will offer him gifts;**

**the kings of Sheba and Seba<sup>[b]</sup> will bring him offerings.**

<sup>11</sup> All kings will bow down before him;  
all nations will serve him.

<sup>12</sup> ***He rescues the poor who call to him,  
and those who are needy and neglected.***

<sup>13</sup> He has pity on the weak and poor;  
he saves the lives of those in need.

<sup>14</sup> ***He rescues them from oppression and violence;  
their lives are precious to him.***

### **Matthew 2:1-12 (Good News translation)**

David Turner

The image of the wise men from the east kneeling before the Christ child, offering their gifts, has been an inspiring symbol of worship for countless generations. The story, itself, has always fascinated people because it links Jesus to the wider world of the orient and to the mysteries of the heavens. These mysterious figures from the east reflect the aspirations of Israel that one day the wise and the powerful would come to Zion to acknowledge Yahweh. These are variations on the theme of the Gentiles sharing in the blessings of Israel. They foreshadow the expansion of the mission from Israel to the Gentiles, to be announced in Matthew 28:18-20. In some sense, therefore, the magi are representative of all of us who are non-Jews. There is also here, the idea that the Gentile outsiders, discern what is going on in a way that the insiders do not. No-one has a monopoly on God.

**2** Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

<sup>5</sup> “In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet wrote:

<sup>6</sup> ‘Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah;  
for from you will come a leader  
who will guide my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup> So Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he

sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions: “Go and make a careful search for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>9-10</sup> And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>11</sup> They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to their country by another road, since God had warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod.

The Gospel of the Lord

***Praise to you Lord Christ***

**Some thoughts...**

**Let's Give: Our Offerings**

**Doxology**

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
praise him, all creatures here below,  
praise him above, ye heavenly host,  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

**Prayer of Dedication**

**Sacrament of Holy Communion**

**Song: Far beyond our mind's grasp (TiS 542, Caturrog Na Nonoy, Bicolano Folk Melody, Francisco F. Feliciano, Philippines)**

**Invitation**

This is the table of the Lord.

It is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more.



So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

It is our Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

### **The Story**

Now let us hear the story of how this sacrament began.

On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating, he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words, 'This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

Later on he took a cup of wine, saying, 'This cup is God's new covenant, sealed, with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me.'

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world which Christ will make special. And as he said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

### **Prayer of Gratitude**

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high,  
voices full and joyful...these you deserve God.

For when we were nothing you made us something; When we had no name and no faith and no future.

You called us to be your children;  
When we lost our way or turned away,  
you did not abandon us;  
When we came back to you,  
your arms opened wide in welcome.  
And look, 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.

You are worth all our pain and all our praise.

So, we join our voices to those of the church on earth and in heaven and say

**(We sing)**

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the  
highest***

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table  
we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.

We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.

Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.

***Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poorest of the earth***

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground  
and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.

***Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty***

We cannot hear your words of peace  
and forget the world at war.

Or, if not at war, then preparing for it.

***Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs  
and the lust for power into a desire for peace***

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions.  
We are one in Spirit but not in fact; history and hurt still dismember us.

***Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.***

### **Prayer of Consecration**

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now,

for all that you have done and all that you have promised.

What have we to offer?

Our hands are empty,  
 our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things.  
 We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table.  
 But with you is mercy  
 and the power to change us.

Send down your Holy Spirit on us  
 and on these gifts of bread and wine  
 that they may become for us your body,  
 healing, forgiving and making us whole;  
 so that we may become, for you, your body,  
 loving and caring in the world until your kingdom comes.  
***Amen.***

Among friends, gathered round a table,  
 Jesus took bread, broke it and said,  
 “This is my body: it’s broken – for you.”

And later he took the cup of wine and said,  
 “This is the new relationship with God  
 made possible because of my death.  
 Take this – all of you.”

***Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy  
 upon us.***

***Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy  
 upon us.***

***O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your  
 peace.***

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

### **Distribution**

We come forward as a family to partake of the elements together at the Communion Table. The cup on the right-hand side as you face the table is unfermented grape juice and the cup on the left-hand side is alcoholic wine.

### **Concluding Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life in our hands, now we put our lives in yours.

Take us, shake us, remake us.  
May we become as God-like as you are human  
**Amen**

**Prayers of the People**

Lawrence Peak

The petitions of the one who prays ends with the plea, "Help us change the world" and the response of the community, is "So we may all breath".

**Hymn: O come all ye faithful (vs 1-6) (TiS, 304, Adeste fidelis, John Francis Wade)**

**Blessing**

You have come to us as a small child,  
but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts,  
the gift of love eternal  
Caress us with Your tiny hands,  
embrace us with Your tiny arms  
and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries.

**Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

***In the name of Christ***

***Amen***

**We sing: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)**

**Postlude**

**Organist:**

Jim Abraham