

Service for Sunday, January 3, 2021
 Provided via Elim's website, Email, and Facebook

The Epiphany of Our Lord



Announcement

Today we will be celebrating the meal of Holy Communion. If you'd like to partake in one of God's greatest gifts, have a small cup of wine or juice and a piece of bread or cracker. We will commune together virtually later in the service.

Greeting

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✝ one God,
 who was in the beginning,
 who makes a dwelling among us,
 who covers us with justice and mercy.
Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of goodness and lovingkindness,
**we confess that we have sinned against you
 and our neighbors.**
We have turned away from your invitation to new life.
We have turned away from the lowly and downtrodden.
In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins,
those we know and those known only to you,
for the sake of the one who came to live among us,
Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Hear the good news of peace and salvation!
God forgives us all our sins,
not through our own work,
but through ✝ Jesus Christ, made known to all people.
With all who come to the manger,
rejoice in this amazing gift of grace.
Amen.



Gathering Hymn

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Text and music: John Henry Hopkins Jr.

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We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

Oh, star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light

Born a king on Bethlehem's plain
 Gold I bring to crown Him again
 King forever, ceasing never
 Over us all to reign

Oh, star of wonder, star of night
 Star with royal beauty bright
 Westward leading, still proceeding
 Guide us to thy perfect light

Myrrh is mine, it's bitter perfume
 Breaths a life of gathering gloom
 Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying
 Sealed in the stone-cold tomb

Oh, star of wonder, star of night
 Star with royal beauty bright
 Westward leading, still proceeding
 Guide us to thy perfect light

The Word

The Old Testament reading for today is from the 60th Chapter of Isaiah.

¹Arise, shine; for your light has come,
 and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

²For darkness shall cover the earth,
 and thick darkness the peoples;
 but the LORD will arise upon you,
 and his glory will appear over you.

³Nations shall come to your light,
 and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

This is the Old Testament lesson.

Today's reading from the Book of Psalms is from the 72nd Chapter.

¹Give the king your justice, O God,
 and your righteousness the king's son;

²that he may rule your people righteously
 and the poor with justice;

- ³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
- ⁴Let him defend the needy among the people,
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.
- ⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.
- ⁶Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,
like showers that water the earth.
- ⁷In his time may the righteous flourish;
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.
- ¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute,
and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.
- ¹¹May all kings bow down before him,
and all the nations do him service.
- ¹²For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress,
the oppressed, and those who have no helper.
- ¹³He has compassion on the lowly and poor,
and preserves the lives of the needy.
- ¹⁴From oppression and violence he redeems their lives,
and precious is their blood in his sight. (Psalm: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14)

Here ends the Psalm.

The New Testament reading for today is from the book of Ephesians, the 3rd Chapter.

¹This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In 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: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of 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. ⁸Although 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, ⁹and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰so 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. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. (Ephesians 3:1-12)

Here ends the reading from the New Testament.

The Gospel for today is from the 2nd Chapter of Matthew. **Glory to You, O Lord.**

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “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.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶“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.’”

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.” ⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (Matthew 2:1-12)

Word of God. Word of life. **Praise to you, O Christ.**



The Message

There are a few facts I'd like to share with you before we really dig into the message for today: First, today we are celebrating Epiphany, but this special day in the church year is really celebrated on January 6th. However, there are some good theological messages associated with this day. So I thought it best to share them with you.

Second, the Wisemen, the Magi, really didn't come to the manger a few days after the Christ Child was born. At least there is no place in Biblical text that says so. It was likely about two years after his birth, but some sources say it could have been later. I'm sorry to say I can't tell you why all the stories make it seem like it's just a few short days later.

You see, scientists have studied the stars and planets and tell us there was something special in the sky roughly two years after Jesus' birth. However, these astronomers might shatter our images when we hear it wasn't really a bright star. There are two explanations of what might have appeared in the sky at that time: it was either a comet, or the direct alignment of two planets which would make the sky seem somewhat brighter than usual.

And my third myth buster is this: The word Magi, from the Greek, literally means “from the rising of the sun.” So that explains why these three nameless Magi might have come from the east where the sun rises, likely the vast area of the Persian empire. And they have no names recorded – there are no names for them in the Bible (sorry about that myth buster, too).

And finally, there is absolutely NO place in the Bible that says there are three Magi. It is probably assumed because of the number of gifts they brought. And there were probably many more camels than the typical Christmas card image of three arriving at the stable with them. You see, it’s likely they had their servants, and gear, and they traveled a long way from the Middle East. So most of what we assume about the Magi is what we see in storybooks and on Christmas cards.

I know I’ve shattered your beliefs of the Magi, the star, the dates, their names- I really do hate to be a myth buster. But let’s take a look what is really important in this story. It’s not the specifics and the logistics, but the why. It is the why - why is this story valued enough yet it is only written in the Gospel of Matthew? This is a story of kings, astrologers, gifts, trickery and betrayal, and escape. Sounds pretty intriguing, almost like one of today’s spy novels. `

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Today’s Bible story from the Gospel reveals to us some important theological foundations and some images which might appeal to our senses. When we understand

these images and theological ideas, it becomes clearer to see how important these 12 short verses from Matthew really are. Still, we reminded this story is only in Gospel of Matthew.

Certainly, the infant Jesus is the main star in the cast, but the Magi are the supporting roles and so is Herod. Herod, in another supporting role, is a jealous, vindictive king who is afraid the Baby Messiah will take over his realm. This king, has the power to build vast palaces, amass riches, and execute and remove threats, yet he is frightened of a little baby.

Perhaps, in the most important part of his role in the Epiphany story, he told the three kings to find the Baby. He wanted to trick them so they would report back as to the location of this child, this Messiah. God has used Herod, this powerful Gentile ruler to fulfill God's plan. God uses the oddest characters to play a part in the ultimate plan for all of humanity...this mean and nasty king.

The Magi also were used by God in this important story. They were eastern Gentiles who worshipped via the faith known as Zoroastrianism. As part of this faith, the Three Kings studied the sky as astronomers, and they also studied the positions of stars and heavenly bodies. They believed the stars gave and explained the power of their one god and all this god did. Once again, God uses unlikely people to carry out God's plans for the world – gentiles and people of different cultures and different faiths.

There is no one useless to God. God is Creator of all humanity. We are all the sons and daughters of the God who loves each of us and uses us to carry out plans for this world.

Jesus did not say anything in this Matthean story. However, he is the main character. He was the true King and the true Messiah, which Herod dreaded. The Zoroastrian kings traveled a great distance in order to fall down on their knees and worship him. They followed the star to the place where the Baby lay and brought gifts. The star, or whatever it was, represents Jesus, the Light of the World.

In Isaiah and Ephesians, the Light of God and the Light of Christ is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the Magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are. And just who are we? In the waters of baptism, we are washed and made children of God who are claimed by God. Then, we are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love for all people.

Even the Old Testament, written long before the prophecy of the coming Messiah, speaks these words:

¹Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

²For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

The significance of these few verses is overwhelming. The Light has come into this world and lifted the cloak of darkness. The glory of the Lord will arise over you and shine brightly for you. And my favorite line, “All nations, all peoples, shall come to the Light, and all kings will see the glory of the Lord.” The one meaningful focus of these verses is the Light of God and it will shine on all people. There is nothing that can overcome this Holy Radiance.

The significance of the star that shone over Bethlehem is for ALL and will never dim.

The other theological part of today’s Gospel is the three gifts the Magi brought to Jesus. Although we never hear what becomes of these gifts, we do know these are prophecy of things to come, not only for Jesus but also for each of us. Frankincense, gold, and myrrh – costly and extravagant gifts the most lowly would never expect. Gold is a precious gift fit for a king, and the Magi honor the Baby as King. A King – Jesus is the King, born a King. Even on the cross where he was crucified was a sign nailed which read “King of the Jews.” This is true. He is the King of the Jews, but Jesus is even a bigger king. He is the King of the World and all humanity.

Frankincense and myrrh are both expensive, valuable gifts, and there is deeper meaning to these gifts, too. Frankincense, costly perfume the Magi give to Jesus, because they worshiped Jesus as the divine. He is the Son of God. He is God. And even early in this child’s life, the myrrh is given to represent the anointing oil for the death of the Messiah.

Three gifts tell so much about the life of Christ. He is the King – the King who rules with a tender hand and serves unlike any other king. Jesus is divine – Son of God and Son of Man. Even though he appears as an innocent child, he truly is divine. And the Baby is anointed as King of the Jews and King of all humankind. We will see him suffer and die on a cross – FOR US. This baby was born to die.

The theology of this story tells us that we have something to do. Let us take a quick look at what happens next in Scripture: the Magi warn Joseph about the fear and threats of Herod. Joseph will then pack up Mary and the baby and flee to Egypt where they are protected from the rule and realm of Herod and become exiles.

Think about the word exile. In this time, we have mothers and children, fathers and families fleeing from South and Central America to escape the violence and danger in their home communities. These precious families are often separated from one another, often not knowing where the others have gone or if they will see their family members again or are if their loved ones are even alive. Many of these people, God's children, are still waiting at borders to escape from the horrible lives they've been living.

But what does this have to do with us? Nothing? It has much to do with each of us. We can offer prayers for all these lives who are stuck in difficult and dangerous situations. We can write letters to our representatives to change and enact laws and mandates which remove these brothers and sisters of Jesus from where they are now exiled.

Let each of us shine with the Light of Christ, doing all we can to shine with love for all. Let us share the Good News with a hurting and dark world. May each of us make a difference to those who suffer and those who need. We are called. We are called to step out into a dark and dreary world to shine, and to love as we have been loved.

Amen.

Sermon Hymn

As with Gladness Men of Old

Text: William C. Dix

Music: Conrad Kocher

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As with gladness men of old
 Did the guiding star behold,
 As with joy they hailed its light,
 Leading onward, beaming bright;
 So, most gracious Lord, may we
 Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
 Savior, to thy lowly bed,
 There to bend the knee before
 Him whom heav'n and earth adore;
 So may we, with willing feet,
 Ever seek Thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
 At that cradle rude and bare;
 So may we with holy joy,
 Pure and free from sin's alloy,
 All our costliest treasures bring,
 Christ, to Thee, our heav'nly King.

Holy Jesus, every day
 Keep us in the narrow way;
 And, when earthly things are past,
 Bring our ransomed souls at last
 Where they need no star to guide,
 Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

In the heav'nly country bright
 Need they no created light;
 Thou, its joy, its light, its crown,
 Thou its sun which goes not down;
 Thou forever may we our praises sing,
 Alleluias to our King.

The Apostles' Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven
 and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
 From there 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.

Prayers of the People

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Glorious God, fill your church with joy. Let your faithful people live as beacons of your redemption. Give wisdom and courage to your church that it may speak with boldness and confidence, even when words of mercy are met with scorn. Bless the work of all

church leaders and workers, and, especially our Bishops Elizabeth and Tessa. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Show us your faithfulness in the rising and setting of the sun. Place wonder into the hearts of those who search the skies and explore the heavens. Curb waste and pollution, that all might have clean air to breathe. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Bring all nations and rulers to the splendor of your dawn. Raise up advocates who champion the cause of exploited and vulnerable people. Inspire leaders to be generous with abundance, that all people might live in stability and freedom. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Come quickly with your healing power to all who seek love, support, and restoration. Dispel fears and shadows. Restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. Bring relief to those who are sick or struggling, especially Gayle Lee – friend of Connie Rawls, Pastor Tony Scheer, Tom Phillips - family of Scott and Pastor Carol Strand, Kim Olschlager, Les Rheault, Marilyn Dolezal, Sarah VanRaden, Bonnie Duggan, Jeanne Roen, Edna Mae Lewis, Judy - Curt Meyer's sister, Rose – Lenora Scheer's niece, Greg Turner, Fern Softing, Brandon - Victoria Savanh's cousin, and those we name in our hearts before you. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Send traveling mercies upon all who journey home by other roads. Guard refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Protect families fleeing conflict in their homelands or abuse in their homes. Tend to those who have no place to lay their heads. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

According to the boundless riches of Christ, you draw all your saints, from the least to the greatest, to your heavenly places. As you created all things, make all things new again in the splendor of your glory. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Holy Communion



The Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us gift thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Epiphany Preface

Holy One,

the beginning and the end,

the giver of life;

Blessed are you for the birth of creation.

Blessed are you in darkness and in light.

Blessed are you for your promise to your people.

Blessed are you in prophets' hopes and dreams.

Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.

Blessed are you for you son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

And so, with the whole Christian church on earth,

We praise your name and join the ending hymn...

**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.

Hosanna in the highest.

Words of Institution

On the night our Lord was betrayed, he took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

After supper, our Lord took the cup gave thanks and blessed it and said to his disciples, "This cup is the new promise in my blood which is shed for you and for ALL people for the forgiveness of sins. When you drink from this cup, remember me, for I will not drink from it until I return."

The Lord's Prayer

As we have been gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray together the pray we have been taught.

Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed by 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

The Word is revealed in a manger, in simple bread and wine.
Come meet Christ in this meal.

We eat and drink together

Prayer after Communion

We give you thanks, gracious God,
that you have once again fed us from your very self
with the body and blood of Christ.

Through this mystery, send us forth
to proclaim your promise to a world in need,
through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Sending Hymn

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Text and music: Kathleen Thomerson

I want to walk as a child of the light,
I want to follow Jesus.
God sent the stars to give light to the world,
The star of my life is Jesus.

In Him, there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I want to see the brightness of God.
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear sun of righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father.

In Him, there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

I'm looking for the coming of Christ,
I want to be with Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race,
We shall know the joy of Jesus.

In Him, there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus

Sending

Blessing

Almighty God,
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,
proclaimed joy through the angels,
sent the shepherds with good news,
and led the magi by a star,
bless you this day ✝ through the Word made flesh.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.
Thanks be to God.



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