

PRAYER: Loving God, you have formed us from the dust, redeemed us from our brokenness, and led us through the waters of the Red Sea, and we have arrived safely on the other side. May our praise and worship of you reflect the awe we have at your watery grace, the grace that sustains us when the waves rise around us. In Jesus name. Amen.

“WELL, PLEASED”

Epiphany comes from the Greek and can be translated as “the light shines forth” or simply, “the light shines.” It refers to the manifestation of some light, which could be knowledge, or understanding, or even relationship.

The first Sunday of the season and the last Sunday after Epiphany contain two revelations that also identify Jesus as God’s Son. We begin with the baptism and then we end with the transfiguration, that misty mountaintop experience.

The magi as the symbol represent the world that comes to see something of significance in the baby in Bethlehem, even when many of those closest don’t see it.

Ordinary time is the season that follows Epiphany, although most of the time we call it the “season after Epiphany.” In Year C of the lectionary cycle, the Epistle readings for this Ordinary Time are the Letters to the Corinthians. Perhaps the best-known passage, or best-loved passage from I Corinthians is chapter 13, the famous “love chapter.” This Epistle reading is a way of seeing the light of Christ through the lens of love. “Love Never Ends” is both a description and a promise.

We journey together as we head towards the Light, guided by the Corinthian epistles to let the light shine around you, and in you, and then from you as we seek to continue to become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We who have seen the light of Christ now Siblings of Christ, have a passionate desire to reflect this brilliant spectacular light in our community and in our world by letting others see Christ through our loving presence.

Epiphany was January 6, so last Thursday. The lectionary took the route of pushing it back to this Sunday. Therefore, our worship is a combined Epiphany/Baptism of the Lord Sunday, wedging magi and baptism into one service.

Epiphany is about the revealing of the light to the world. Not all see it, of course; this is why Jesus frequently said, “let those who have ears to hear, hear.” Even we have moments where we aren’t so sure that we have seen that light. Yet, we who gather for worship have caught a glimpse of something, and we come to celebrate and to lean into that hope. What we have come to understand is that we are to be the light, so that others might see in us the light of Christ. We might, then, acknowledge the light we have seen in one another and give God thanks for that vision in the darkness as we seek the light, to ask God to reveal God’s self to us in unmistakable ways.

We begin on Epiphany with the wise men who saw the star. They were given an epiphany, a revelation about who this child really was – not the son of a poor girl and her husband who couldn’t find a room in the inn, but the savior of the world.

And in that baptism of light, we can hear the words of blessing that Jesus heard and know that we are pleasing to God:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Through the Sacrament of Baptism

we are initiated into Christ's holy Church.

We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation

and given new birth through water and the Spirit.

All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

People of God, blessings are given and received as we remember our baptism together, even as we commemorate Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river.

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

I do.

People of a graceful God, know that each one of you as an individual matter. Today, we hear the words that remind us that we matter to God - "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.". What better blessing can we receive than that?

But have you wondered why is Jesus even at the Jordan River in the first place?

Here is the leap I'm asking you to make with me this weekend: Jesus went to John to be baptized because he was entering into this messy world that we live in. All of us are born into a world not of our making – a world we can barely understand at the best of times, a world we cannot explain at the worst of times, a world that needs repentance, which is a corporate need as much as an individual one. Jesus strode into the river to be buried up to the neck in the sin of the world, and then to rise to the Spirit. He didn't approve of the brokenness of this world, but he embraced it; he made it his, and he carried it with him, like a chip on the shoulder, like a pack on his back; he carried it all the way to the cross.

And what did he say, when he embraced all that is wrong in this life, all that is less than divine, less than holy? What words did he use to give meaning and understanding and explanation? He didn't say a thing. Like us, he was silent. Did he want to speak? Or was the weight of the burden he accepted so heavy that even he was struck dumb? Like us, he was silent. So that he would know what we experience when we have no words to say in the face of death or worse.

There were words spoken in that moment, though. Words that echo in the silence of our moments even to this day. They weren't his words or ours or any human words. They were God's words, and they said simply, "I love you." They were words of affirmation, not for deeds done or not done, but for being—just for being." I love you" – words to hear in the midst of darkness, words to cling to in the midst of doubt. In the maelstrom of living and of dying, we hear and then—by grace—speak these words; they are all we have: "I love you! And all the words we will ever need.

"This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.".

Light of God, illumine the path that leads us to healing, hope and salvation.

Glory of God, fill this sanctuary and expose the darkness that stalks our souls.

Light of God, shine with such brightness that we marvel in awe.

Glory of God, fill each person with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Light of God, Glory of God, we welcome you into our life. Amen.