

Morning Prayer

For Epiphany

GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

Introductory Responses

Leader: Blessed are you, O Christ, incarnate Word,
you were before time began
and came into the world to save us.

All: **Blessed are you, Sun of righteousness;
you shine with the love of God
and illumine the whole universe.**

Blessed are you, Child of Mary;
born in a manger, you shared our humanity.

Let heaven and earth shout their praise.

With all the voices of heaven,
we celebrate your coming, O Emmanuel.

**Let heaven and earth shout their praise.
With all the creatures on earth
we sing and dance at your birth, O Shoot of Jesse.**

Let heaven and earth shout their praise.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Isaiah Chapter 60, Verses:1-6

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.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

**Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God:
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be for ever. Amen.**

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians Chapter 3, Verses:1-12

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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

The Responsory

**The Word of life which was from the beginning
we proclaim to you.**

The darkness is passing away
and the true light is already shining;
the Word of life which was from the beginning.
That which we heard, which we saw with our eyes,
and touched with our hands,
we proclaim to you.
For our fellowship is with God
and with God's beloved, Jesus the Christ.

**The Word of life which was from the beginning
we proclaim to you.**

Matthew Chapter 2, Verses:1-12

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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

The Canticle - *A Song of God's Chosen One (Isaiah 11.1, 2, 3b-4a, 6, 9)*

There shall come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse, *
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

**And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, *
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,**

the spirit of counsel and might, *
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

**He shall not judge by what his eyes see, *
or decide by what his ears hear,**

but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, *
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

**The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, *
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,**

the calf, the lion and the fatling together, *
with a little child to lead them.

**They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, *
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.**

**Glory to the holy and undivided Trinity, one God:
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be for ever. Amen.**

A Sermon for Epiphany

Most of us can remember high school English class and being taught what Epiphany means. The moment when things come clear in a novel, a revelation of some new information that resolves, or at least begins to the plot line of the story. The scripture writers take a slightly different track with Epiphany. The implication is that an Epiphany is a journey, a showing, a direction which we are all invited to take. Luke in his gospel, has the poor searching, in the form of the shepherds. Matthew, in his gospel, that we just heard, gives us the learned and the rich searching, in the form of the wise men. The conclusion you can make is pretty obvious, there is room for everybody in this search, this unfolding, which promises to resolve the plot line of human history, begun long ago in the garden.

So what about these wise men who we meet this morning? Smart guys who didn't find what they work looking for in the wisdom and teaching of their own lands; brave men willing to make a long journey to find the truth. Flexible thinkers willing to entertain and new way, full of potential, yet not fully known. And to help us appreciate these men and their decisions the bible doesn't just give us these three wise men, we get another set as well.

You don't likely remember them. We like the first set better. Medieval Christianity gave them names; Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. We didn't give names to the second lot of wise men. They are the ones that King Herod called in. The scribes and the Pharisees. Herod calls his wise men in, and says; "I've got a problem."

And when you've got a problem it's wise to call in people smarter than you. King Herod was a lot of things but give him credit here – he called in the best and brightest. He gathered them and asked them; "I've been told of the birth of a Messiah; I want to know where he is to be born."

And the wise men, these wise men, come up with the correct answer. They tell the King; “In Bethlehem of Judea.” And we never hear from them again in this story of Epiphany. That’s a funny thing really. They knew where the Messiah was to be born. They’ve been told by their King, a man not without some wee bit of wisdom himself, that wise men from the East have said the Messiah has been born. And they do nothing. Their hearts did not follow their heads. They gave lip service and head service to their faith. You know, like, “One of these days you know I’m gonna go back to church.” “Someday I’ll stop and try to figure out life’s meanings.” “Someday I’ll make and keep my new years resolutions.” Someday.

So this first group of wise men, do nothing, take no risk. How often do we mistake the path of no risk for the wise path? And make no mistake there was risk here. Suppose they had gone in search of the Messiah, and had found the Messiah. What changes would they have had to make in their lives? What would happen to their place? And so they thought about it, wise men always think about it, and they concluded, they must have because we never hear of them again in the Epiphany story, they decided it was better, wiser, to talk about all this, but to nothing about it.

Good thing we have the Wise men we’re more familiar with. The one’s worthy of our respect, the ones who took a risk and came looking for the Messiah. And risks they took, they risked talking to King Herod, they risked having their lives turned upside down at the very least. And that’s no small thing.

It is one of the consistent themes of the Gospels you know, we’re presented with choice, with risk. The Epiphany story is about more than exotic kings floating across the deserts of the middle east. Luke is giving us, presenting us with a choice; between two kinds of wise men, two different wise paths through life. We have those who play it safe, maintain the status quo. And we have those who take the risk. Wise men who sit around and think about important things, but never do them and wise men and women who think things through and then do something about it. Wise ones willing to change themselves in order to change the world.

And so the plot comes down to you and me. What are we going to do about Epiphany, about our faith in a Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, through whom God created all things? What kind of wise people shall we be?

Well, one good thing, you and I have decided to be part of a community of believers. We're part of this caravan called Anglicanism. And there's no shortage of wisdom in our tradition. And it's a wise thing to be part of a faith community bigger than we are; because no one on this entire earth can journey through life alone. There simply is no such thing as a self made man or woman.

And another brilliant thing about being part of a community of believers is the realization that we're not all at the same place in our common journey. Some of us are way up front; some of us are dragging along in the rear; some of us are willing; some of us are dragging our feet. Some of us journey with great certainty. They've found Jesus. They've seen the face of their Lord. Others of us journey with a degree of doubt, both large and small. Some of us are still trying to figure out what our place is around here in this caravan. Some of us are struggling with big questions about life and the true nature of God.

And we have veteran seekers here; and we have new ones who've just joined in the journey. I could go on; but the important thing is that we're all here, all part of the same journey. We know which wise men, which wise women we want to become. And so we risk some credibility and join a church. We risk some ridicule because it's hard to say your spiritual and not religious when your friends know you go to church on Sunday.

And the payoff for the risk is a community in which, if we're faithful to the Messiah, we say was born those few days ago, is that we can find encouragement in the times when we're struggling with life and doubts. And those who are devout can be a sign to those who are less so. And the young and the innocent can be hope to those have borne the struggle of the long journey. We have the brightest and the best among us, and we have folks who had trouble getting past grade eight.

We have folks here whose lives are a mess, whose relationships are fractured. We have folks of great virtue who've made decisions that would make the rest of us crumble. We're a slice of the great sea of humanity that makes up God's glorious, diverse creation. And like the magi we're all on a journey of discovery.

And there is a promise in this Epiphany season. A promise God makes to humanity through the scriptures. Wherever we are in this adventure we called life, we will, every single one of us, reach the goal of the journey. We will all one day present our gifts to the Messiah, who'll then stand beside us, and present us to the Lord of all Creation, as the most precious gift of all – a human being who sought to be faithful, who took the risk of faith in a loving God. And we'll be welcomed home. Amen.

An Affirmation of Faith *said by all*

**We believe in God, the creator and giver of life,
who brought all creation to birth,
who mothers us and fathers us,
protecting, nurturing,
and cherishing us.**

**We believe in Jesus Christ:
God born among us as a fragile baby,
embodying both love and the need for love,
and calling us to rest in God as trustingly as a tiny child.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, breathed into us at our birth,
always drawing us on to be born again,
encouraging, exhorting, comforting,
nourishing our growth and inspiring our living.**

Continued ...

We believe in the reconciliation
of the world to God, through Christ.
Hunted at birth and humiliated at death,
Christ entered our fearful darkness
so that we might enter his glorious light
and share the life of his resurrection.

And we believe that each new child
is a glimpse of the face of God,
a sign of the life to come, and a call to live in peace
and celebrate living together.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.
Amen.

— written by Nathan Nettleton, 1999, incorporating some lines from "Midwife of our lives" by Kathy Galloway
published in Kathy Galloway (ed.) *The Pattern of Our Days*, Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1996, p.138.

Posted on Nettleton's Laughingbird.net website.

THE PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY

Leader: Let us pray to the Creator of the universe.
Holy One, by the good news of our salvation
brought to Mary by the angel:
Hear us and grant us peace.

By the mystery of the Word made flesh:
Hear us and grant us peace.

By the birth in time of the timeless Son of God:
Hear us and grant us peace.

By the manifestation of your Beloved to the shepherds:
Hear us and grant us peace.

By the obedience of the Maker of the world to Mary and Joseph:

Hear us and grant us peace.

In the **Anglican Cycle of Prayer**, we pray for The Diocese of Aba – The Church of Nigeria

Hear us and grant us peace.

For our **Bishops** Linda our Primate, Mark our National Indigenous Archbishop, Anne our Metropolitan, and Susan our Bishop;

Hear us and grant us peace.

In the **Diocese of Niagara**, we pray for St. John the Evangelist, Thorold, The Rev'd. Canon Kathy Morgan Rector, The Rev'd. Deacon Keith Pidduck and the people of that parish; For the clergy and people who share in the ministry of our parish of St. John's.

Hear us and grant us peace.

Today we pray for the following **people and their families**: Lorna Anstruther, Roger & Laurie Armstrong, Carol Aubin, Edwin Ball and Betty Balford. And in our community we pray for those who volunteer and offer leadership to the Breakfast Club.

Hear us and grant us peace.

We remember those who are close to us, for **those who are ill**: Lucas, Maria, Kelly-Lynne, Jan, Aisling, Helen, Bev, Kathy, Adam, Wendy & Gary, Maryse, Gary, Cassandra & Max, Shirley, Lee, Mary, Barb, Mylee, Betty, Patti, David, the Guerin family the Sorley family, baby Parker, Betty, Pat, Michael, Larry, Karen, Vicky, Carol, Rachel, Wally, Vera, Jane, Barry, Margaret, for all affected by Covid-19, and for others who need our prayers, ...

Hear us and grant us peace.

The Collect of the Day

Bright Morning Star, your light has come, and the birth of Jesus has overwhelmed us with joy. Like the magi of long ago, may we be drawn to you and offer such gifts as we are able. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us and gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray as our Saviour taught us,

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

THE SENDING FORTH OF THE COMMUNITY

The Dismissal

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.
**Thanks be to God.
May God, who has called us out of darkness into the
marvellous light of Christ, bless us and fill us with peace.
Amen.**