

Sunday January 7, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.

*Please stand if you are able

Prelude

Welcome, Announcements and Recognition of January Birthdays

We Gather Around God's Word

Bells and Chimes Call To Worship:

Hymn of Invocation: v.1 "Christ, Be Our Light" (See PowerPoint)

Call to Worship: ☺

L: We gather in the Light that was before, is now, and ever will be.

P: We seek the Light's ancient wisdom.

L: We gather in the Light that is God's continuing gift.

P: We live into the Light's new wisdom.

L: We gather in the Light that is our own, emerging anew each day.

**All: We seek to share this wisdom,
nurtured in the Light from Bethlehem's cradle.**

Hymn of Prayer: v.v. 2-4 "Christ Be Our Light" (See PowerPoint)

Prayer of Confession: ☺ (See PowerPoint)

Assurance of God's Grace ☺ (See PowerPoint)

Passing of God's Peace

We Engage God's Word

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6 (Page 617)
Ephesians 3:1-12 (Page 1006)
Matthew 2:1-12 (Page 808)

Youth Moment Lord's Prayer

Reflection: "No One Is beyond God's Embrace"

"There's a wonder and magic (no pun intended) about this story of wondering magi led to Jesus from the distant East by a star. It testifies to the far-reaching – indeed, global and cosmic! – implications of Jesus' birth. Even more, it witnesses to God's commitment to reach all the world with news of God's redeeming love." (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1509>) It also reveals that God's revelations comes through those who might follow other faith traditions, but through God's grace and their obedience to God's leading, they are not only drawn to Christ, but reveal to those in the faith who Christ is.

Craig Saterlee reminds us that *"While Christian tradition holds that the Magi were kings (an interesting contrast between these kings' response to Jesus' birth and the way Herod, king of God's*

people, responded), a more precise description might be that the Magi belonged to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism, which paid particular attention to the stars. This priestly caste gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science.

So these Wise Ones from the East were scientists and practiced other religions, and God used their faith and knowledge to bring them to the Christ. More ironic, God used scientists who practiced other religions to let King Herod and the chief priests and scribes of the people in on the news that their Messiah had been born.

God seems to do whatever it takes to reach out to and embrace all people. God announces the birth of the Messiah to shepherds through angels on Christmas, to Magi via a star on Epiphany, and to the political and religious authorities of God's own people in through visitors from the East. From a manger, where a child lies wrapped in bands of cloth, God's reach, God's embrace in Christ Jesus, gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Jesus eats with outcasts and sinners. Jesus touches people who are sick and people who live with disabilities. Jesus even calls the dead back to life. Ultimately, Jesus draws all people to himself as he is lifted up on the cross. In Christ Jesus, no one is beyond God's embrace."

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1525)

Today we are celebrating the feast of Epiphany which is a revelation of God. In today's story the Wise Ones received that epiphany through God's grace and their obedience and their obedience to God's leading to the Christ child. The epiphany story not only reveals to us the depth and far reach of God's grace and love, and through whom God works and is revealed, but it also reveals the various reactions humanity has to the revelation of God in our midst. Not all embraced the in breaking of God as good news. David Lose reminds us that there is a "note of fear and opposition that Jesus' birth occasions right from the start. Herod, after all, does not greet the news of a newborn king with joy, nor does he search for a fit gift to present he messiah. Rather, he is afraid. And not just Herod, but "all Jerusalem with him" (v.3).

Why? Perhaps it is because the one thing the powerful seek more than anything else is to remain in power. Gone from Herod and his court is any notion of the kind of servant leadership prescribed and required by Israel's prophets. Gone is the memory that God placed them in their positions to serve rather than be served. Herod seeks his own ends and so is immediately threatened by even the mere mention of another – and therefore rival – king."

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1509>) Maybe it is a fear of change?

At any rate, this epiphany story reveals that "fear is a powerful thing. In response to their fear, Herod, along with the chief priests and scribes, conspire to find the Messiah and kill him. They will not succeed this time, but much later in the story there will again be an unholy alliance between the political and religious leaders of the day who will not only conspire against Jesus but this time capture and crucify him." (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1509>)

With this revelation it challenges us to ponder these questions. And what about us? What does fear do to us? Do we install more security systems in our homes and cars? Do we build more gates or buy more guns? Do we save even more for retirement, pulling back from charitable contributions to make sure we have enough? Do we close our hearts – and minds – to those who are different? What? (<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1509>)

Or, will we be a part of God's epiphany. Not only is Christ's birth an epiphany, but Christ's baptism when the heavens are opened up. The Shepherds experienced an epiphany through the announcement of the angels. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians we see that Paul is a vessel of God's Epiphany. "3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

² Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ... ¹⁰ His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." (NIV)

Theologian Kristin Lewis shares these thoughts on Epiphany. "Our world needs more epiphanies -- and not just the ones to which we point, name, or describe -- but the epiphanies that we are willing to be. What if living out your baptism in the world was committed to being just that? To be the ones who tear apart the boundaries that try to keep God from whom God loves? Who tear apart the boundaries that inhibit others from experiencing God's grace? Who tear apart the boundaries constructed to determine who is saved and who isn't? Yes, the world needs more epiphanies -- those of us ready to take on the responsibility of our baptism."

(<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5037>) And I would add, as we embrace our baptism, may we never forget that God's grace is intended for all and no one is beyond God's embrace. May we also recognize that God is revealed in and through ways and people we might not ever imagine.

God of all creation, who created us in your image, help us in this New Year to become a new creation in You. Help us to recognize your epiphanies from wherever they may come. Help us to hear Your voice, to trust in You, and to be obedient to Your ways as you direct and redirect our paths and in that obedience may we be a vessel of your epiphany still today. Empower us with Your Holy Spirit. We ask this in the name of Christ our Savior. Amen

We Respond to God's Word

Sharing Joys, Concerns, and Prayers for the World

Offering Invitation/Offertory/

Offertory Hymn : #495 v.v. 1-3 "Called as Partners in Christ's Service"

Commissioning of Lay Leadership: (See PowerPoint)

Commissioning Hymn: v.5 "Christ be Our Light" (See PowerPoint)

*Bringing the Offerings Forward

*Epiphany Doxology:

Praise God the source of life and breath;

Praise Christ, now born to conquer death;

Praise Holy Spirit's mystery:

One God, pure grace, who sets us free. Amen.

*Prayer of Dedication: 🙏 (In Unison)

Loving God, we ask that you pour out your blessings upon us and these gifts. May these gifts reveal to us and to others the Light that is Jesus.

And may this Light lead us on into new and challenging ways of living and serving you, one another, and all of creation. Amen

*Communion Hymn: #342 "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread"

Sacrament of Holy Communion: (See PowerPoint)

We Are Sent Into the World

Sending Hymn: #584 “*I Am the Light of the World*”

*** Benediction and Response:**

GO NOW IN PEACE

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