

## PARTICIPATORY FAITH

1/10/21 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Live-streamed*)

Epiphany: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7,10-14; ~~Ephesians 3:1-12~~; Matthew 2:1-12

Today, we observe the Epiphany. Epiphany is one of those Feast days slated ideal for baptism. Other days are the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. They're all celebrations that remind us of our communal nature as Christians, reinforcing the cross-like shape of our faith: the vertical being the way we think of God's connection to humanity; and the horizontal being our connection with each other.

We don't have one direction without the other. The two movements—God to humanity and humanity to each other—are interdependent, inextricably linked, and necessary to the other.

Whenever I prepare a family for baptism, I explain the four levels of ordination present in *The Book of Common Prayer*. There are a few people who will be ordained to the role of bishop; some of us are ordained to the priesthood; and others will be ordained as vocational deacons. But the fourth type of ordination happens at baptism, and it is the most important of all—that is the ordination of all of you to the ministry of the laity.

One of the reasons your ministry is so important is that we all are church together; a priest alone does not make a church. But you have an added benefit you might not've considered; in your ministry, as a layperson, you actually have the leeway to do what you deem to be the most appropriate for your faith journey, and the most beneficial to those with whom you interact.

I, on the other hand, have taken a vow to obey my bishop, and our bishop has taken vows to uphold and abide by the canons (or laws) of the Church. Each level of ordination comes with greater restrictions on one's ministry. But you can all live out your particular ministry using your God-given gifts in the way you feel most called!

As we make our way from Christmastide to the Epiphany, you'll note that same shift in the revelation of Christ. At first, everything's focused on God incarnating into the world—on what God is doing for humanity. Then, as shepherds and, next, magi make their way to the scene—and do their parts to share the Good News—rather than just God's action, it's the laity—the everyday people—who are doing the proclaiming.

So, it is from that vantage point that I found this year's theme for our celebration of Epiphany—that our faith journey is participatory. We are not meant to be passive observers in the Reign of God, rather active participants right alongside Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

And in this time when COVID-related death rates are at an all-time high; when dehumanizing rhetoric is used to instill hatred; when there are those willing to engage in a violent assault on our nation's Capitol, we must all fully participate in bringing God's Good news to the world, proclaiming the truth of our Prince of Peace.

The magi didn't have it all figured out, but they participated. They're sometimes referred to as, "wisemen" or "three kings," but the translation is more accurately, "magi." Magi were people trained in things like philosophy, interpreting dreams, and astrology. They were not spiritual leaders or religious thinkers, per se, and, yet, when they are called to follow the star, they willingly oblige. But there's this sense in the passage from Matthew that they hadn't really considered what affect coming face-to-face with the Christ-child might have on them.

And, like so many others, they can't seem to resist the feeling that overcomes them in the presence of the Prince of Peace. The passage says: "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." In their joy, they fully participate by opening their hearts to what's going on, and receiving for themselves the Good News of God's all-encompassing love.

Further along in the passage we find signs of their newfound loyalty. Although the magi were, at first, caught up in a convoluted scheme by Herod, once they are present to the Christ-child, they realize Herod has destructive plans in mind, and so the magi decide to go home another way.

Furthermore, Epiphany is a reminder that the story didn't end with Jesus's birth, but that the Prince of Peace came among us so that we might be bearers of the Good News. That is the ministry to which all of you have been ordained!

As I mentioned in the "From My Living Room to Yours" video this week, one of the gifts of the pandemic just might be that we have been forced into being more resourceful as creators of our own sacred space. When we can't go inside a church building, we have to explore how we might more fully participate to be Church in other places.

So, in the video, I share the tradition of an Epiphany House Blessing. And, in the prayer that was included in the kit is another reminder that our participation in ministry extends out to others. The prayer reads:

Bless this house and all who inhabit it. Fill us with the light of Christ,  
so that our concern for others may reflect your love.

The Prince of Peace came among us, so that...we might be a blessing to others.

Our nation's current state of division, the political unrest and the pandemic might feel like an awful form of darkness. This morning's Psalm offers us comfort: "God shall redeem our lives from oppression and violence." But we must always read Scripture while questioning how we are reflecting that good news into the world.

At your baptism, you were likely given a candle—if not an actual candle, then certainly a metaphorical one—and as the candle was held in front of you, the priest said: "receive the light of Christ; shine it brightly into the world."

Epiphany calls us all to fully participate in being Church, holding up our own little light each in our own way. Because when I let my little light shine, and you join your little light, and the rest of you add your little lights, together, we shine a bright light into the darkness, reflecting God's love; love that is all-encompassing and all-inclusive. Dear siblings in Christ, don't hide your little light behind anything; let it shine and let it shine brightly!

-AMEN

### **Collect of the Day:**

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

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 the King's Son;  
That he may rule your people righteously \*  
and the poor with justice;  
That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, \*  
and the little hills bring righteousness.  
He shall defend the needy among the people; \*  
he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor.  
He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure, \*  
from one generation to another.  
He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, \*  
like showers that water the earth.  
In his time shall the righteous flourish; \*  
there shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.  
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, \*  
and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.

All kings shall bow down before him, \*  
and all the nations do him service.

For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, \*  
and the oppressed who has no helper.

He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; \*  
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, \*  
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

### **Ephesians 3:1-12**

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.

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

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.