

Home Service for January 3

Welcome and Announcements

You might notice a few changes. You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Light Shines in the darkness and the darkness fades like a passing dream. Will we turn in reverence to the light, or will we turn away, distracted by other things? Follow the light of the world.

Call to Worship:

As Christians, we rejoice that when we seek God, God finds us first. We have come to claim our destiny. We have decided to become -- or become yet again -- the people of God. We have come to do and to be what God calls us to. We welcome you with thanksgiving to this time of worship and this place of empowerment and grace. Come, let us worship the newborn king!

Opening Prayer:

God of starlight, disperse the darkness of our lives, that we may behold the light of your love shining in every corner of our world. Guide our footsteps in the paths of righteousness, that justice may flourish and peace may abound. Help us follow the kings of old, that through our own journeys of faith, we may behold the mystery made known through the coming of your Glory in the infant Jesus. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, we go about our days failing to proclaim your saving power with our voices or with our actions. We do not live as ones saved, but rather as people filled with fear and doubt. We often choose what is expedient, not what is right. We close our eyes and ears to those who are in need, and close our hearts to those we claim to love. We are quick to hurt others, and slow to right our wrongs. Forgive us, O God, for all the ways we have not lived into our relationship with you. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Friends, "God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his

steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.” In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Read Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
² May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
³ May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
⁴ May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.
⁵ May he endure^[a] as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
⁶ May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
⁷ In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.
May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores
bring tribute to him.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.
¹¹ May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.
¹² For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
¹³ He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
¹⁴ He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight.

Prayers of the People:

The holiday is over but the work of Christmas is just beginning. Guide us, loving God, as we follow in the footsteps of the one whose birth we celebrate. Grant us the grace to order our lives so that others might know that we have knelt in Bethlehem and worshiped the newborn king. On the threshold of this new year, let

us remember to follow the star instead of the crowd. If we lose our way, help us to remember, O God, the angel songs and the gift born to us in the darkness of night and in the depth of winter that we might have life and have it abundantly.

As the light from the star guided the wise men of old, O God, so might your love shine from within us to encircle and embrace all those who have lost their way. Nowhere is the spirit of Christmas more radiantly present than in the simple faith of a child. We claim that faith as our own in the name of the Christ child, born to us this holy season.

The holiday is over but the work of Christmas is just beginning. Let it begin with us as we pray with gratitude the prayer of the one who calls us to new life, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to say when we pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Isaiah 60:1-6

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.

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

⁴ “Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters are carried on the hip.

⁵ Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.

⁶ Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.

And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 3:1-12

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. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 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.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’^[b]”

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Message

We are now entering the Epiphany season of the church. That is a strange word for most of us. It is the season of the church year that follows the Christmas season. Today we celebrate the day of Epiphany, the festival of the church in which Jesus is made known to the world. The meaning of the word Epiphany is, "to show forth," "to make known", "to reveal."

Today in our lesson the scriptures tell us why Jesus came, or who did Jesus come for? Who did Jesus come for? Jesus came for everyone. And that answer doesn't seem right to a lot of folks. How can God come to everyone, surely, not everyone, they think, but that is exactly who He came for, everyone.

The Day of the Epiphany is the day that the magi or the wise men brought their gifts to the baby Jesus. We have in our modern-time combined the events of Christmas and Epiphany together. But in the Christmas story in Matthew's gospel the wise men came after the Christmas night. They came 12 days after the birth of the baby. But did you know that if we were to be completely precise, the wise men wouldn't actually appear until about two years after Christmas!

Tradition has led us to assume many things about these men that the Bible does not tell us. For one, we often refer to them as “kings,” which is probably not accurate. To call them wise is probably fair, as the mostly likely possibility is that these men were astrologers. We have always referred to them as the “three wise men,” but we do not actually know their number.

The true nature of this baby Jesus is revealed in the story of the three magi or the three wise men who came to worship this baby. They were not Jews, but gentiles, wise men from the east. Tradition says the three were Caspar, Melichor, and Balthazar and each was of a different nationality or skin color. One was white, another black skinned, and another brown. These three wise men come to symbolize for the church and for the ministry of Jesus the radical call to be the God of every person regardless of skin color or nationality. And the gifts they brought even spoke louder to the nature of this baby.

One brought gold. We know that gold is the king of all metals. It is the most prized of any element in the earth. It is a gift fit for a king. And since Jesus was a king, a heavenly king this gift fit him perfectly. We must remember that Jesus is a king and we cannot meet him on equal terms. We must always meet Him on terms of complete submission and complete surrender. Jesus is the King of our lives but He rules with a loving heart. He first wants us to know that He is the ruler, the king of our lives, then He will treat us with love and respect.

Another gift that the wise men brought was that of Frankincense. Frankincense was used in the temple as a perfume in the sacrifices to God. The wise men by giving this gift to Jesus looked at him as a priest. A priest means one who builds bridges. So Jesus as the priest of our lives, builds bridges between us and God. It was Jesus on the cross built the ultimate bridge between man and God. For Jesus through his death and resurrection built an everlasting bridge between God and man. Jesus is our bridge only through him can we truly know the Father and the Father truly know us.

Finally, myrrh was the spice used to embalm the dead. This was a symbol of the sacrifice, the atonement which Jesus made on our behalf before God. Myrrh was the symbol that Jesus was to be the suffering servant, the one who would die for the sins of another, so all could have an opportunity for life.

So the gifts that the wise men brought Jesus were gifts that fit Jesus calling. Jesus is the king of our lives, the priest who makes bridges between us and God, and also Jesus had to die for us on the cross so that we might have eternal life.

But what gifts do we bring to Jesus. I think that the one gift we can bring to Jesus is the gift of our lives. Jesus wants us to surrender our whole selves to his love and power. Jesus wants us to give Him our lives so that He can give us a gift, the gift of eternal life. Let us give Jesus the greatest gift we can, the gift of our lives, the gift of complete surrender.

On Epiphany, we celebrate the Magi's visit to see Jesus, and note how they were transformed by their experience of the Christ child. As we start a new year, let us resolve to make things different; to live a life transformed by Jesus.

Jesus' birth means nothing if it is not celebrated throughout the year. Jesus' birth means nothing if it does not change our lives. I'm talking lives changed for years to come. The wise men followed that star for several months, if not years. They did not stray from their path; they did not abandon their journey. They pressed on until they found what they were looking for. And when they did, they fell to their knees in worship of this tiny king. They knew their lives would never be the same, and so they worshipped the King of kings and Lord of lords. Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of peace.

So must we. Christ has come into our very midst. Emmanuel has been born among us. God's kingdom has broken into this world. But it is all for naught if we do not follow a different path. God's kingdom is not of this world. God's ways are not our ways. We have to follow a different path, the path that Jesus prepared for us through his very own life. This is the way of selflessness, generosity, humility, peace, and love. It may indeed be the road less traveled, but it is the road that assures Christ's continuing presence and growing kingdom in our world. The gift is of God, but the choice is ours. Amen.

Benediction:

May all your journeys be led by the brightness of God.

May you be generous with your time and gifts.

May you have the courage to trust the inner voices and find new ways to the heart of God. Amen.