

Immanuel United Church
The 2nd Sunday of Epiphany
Stewardship Sunday 2022 at Immanuel
Jan 16th, 2022

Welcome

Introduction to Stewardship Sunday 2022, at Immanuel:

Hi everyone! On the second Sunday of Epiphany, today, we continue to explore the gift of Epiphany. Epiphany marks the Nativity story of three wise ones following an unusual star until it stopped over the place where the baby Jesus was. "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." In Greek, the word *epiphaneia* means 'appearing'. Epiphany points not just the appearing of the light from an unexpected quarter of the sky, but to God's guidance, dream, the grace that God reveals to the world through the epiphany of Christ.

The next five Epiphany/Stewardship services at Immanuel, including today's have been created with the use of the United Church stewardship service resource, "Discover Your Gifts — Share Your Gifts (Five Sundays in Epiphany)" (https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/ctb-2022_discover-gifts-share-gifts.docx) to help our community of faith take a closer look at what a variety of texts have to say about gifts that are revealed to us — what it means to share those gifts as a fundamental part of discipleship.

These worship resources were collaboratively prepared by: Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth, and Young Adults in the Atlantic Regions (who lives in Riverview, New Brunswick); Evan ∂∏^α Smith, Toronto Urban Native Ministry, Shining Waters Region; Ian March-MacCuish, First United Church, Mount Pearl, NL, First Dawn Eastern Edge Region; and Matthew Fillier, Lead Minister of Bedford United Church, Bedford, NS, Region 15.

Discover your gifts. Share your gifts. It's what disciples of Jesus do.

Greeting

God is good
All the time.
All the time
God is good.

Settler Acknowledgement of Our Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Long before my people journeyed to this land, Indigenous people were here (*Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation*), and they received from their Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. When they shared their vision, my people did not hear. My people tried to force Indigenous peoples to be like us, and, in so doing, we helped to destroy the vision that made them what they were.

We are in the midst of a long and painful journey as we reflect on the cries that our church did not or would not hear, and how we have behaved as a church. As we travel this difficult road of repentance, reconciliation, and healing, we commit ourselves to work toward ensuring that we will never again use our power as a church to hurt others with attitudes of racial and spiritual superiority.

We pray that all Indigenous people will hear the sincerity of our words today and that they will witness the living out of our apology in our actions in the future.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

We light this candle, honouring the One who said "I am the Light."

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 43:1–7)

Come in, hearing these words:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.

Come in, knowing these words to be true:

I have called you by name, you are mine.

Come in, feeling these words in your bones:

You are precious in my sight.

We come to worship, hearing, knowing, feeling the love and wonder of our God.

Opening Prayer:

God of gifts that transform, we gather in awe and wonder at the ways in which you name us. Throughout time and space, you have called to our spiritual ancestors, naming them and renaming them as your people, to live in delight at being yours.

Today, you continue to call to us, naming and renaming us, that in our quest for delight, we might see in us what you see, and share that splendour with the world.

May this time of worship help us to hear our names, that we might remember that your goodness lives in us and calls us forth to be members of your family, your creation. May your Spirit rest upon us now as it rested upon Jesus. In humility, we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Hymn: VU 82 *A Light Is Gleaming*

Exploring the Epiphany Box:

Happy New Year, Immanuel friends!

Have you ever looked up and found stars in the winter night sky?

Let's open today's Bible Story, in Children's Spark StoryBible, page 204.

In the story, Three Wise Men found a very special star and decided to follow it. They knew it was a sign from God to tell them where the baby Jesus was born. Travelling far was not easy, but they were excited to meet the baby Jesus in-person. So they travelled together, following the star, and when the star stopped they found Jesus, Mary, Joseph in Bethelhem! They were overwhelmed with joy. The three wise men greeted baby Jesus and gave him the gifts they brought from their homeland: gold, myrrh, frankincense.

Today's story is called Epiphany. Can you say it with me? E-pi-pha-ny! Epiphany means the light has **appeared!** The light is shown to us! Jesus, the light of the world, the light in the world, is shown to us! "Jesus was God's promise born for us, a gift to all people!" Just like that, each of you, every child of God is a gift to the world.

Within a few weeks, Immanuel United Church would like to send you a gift, the Epiphany Box. I wonder what you will find in it. We hope you like them.

Ding dong!

(Jah-bi delivers the Epiphany Box to Ha Na.)

Wow! This is a very pretty box. It says "Epiphany Box". I see stars on the wrapping paper. I like the bows and the ribbon. I wonder what I will find in it."

(Looking at the camera) What do you think is inside of such a pretty box?

Song: *This Little Light of Mine*

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Imagine the kind of world we would have if we thought of all gifts and all giving as being extraordinary because they remind us that all we have is a gift from God to be shared with each other?

How would sharing this gift remind others that they, too, are a gift?

Scripture: Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

The Choir Anthem: *Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord*

Reflection: The Gift of Affirmation

Today's reading describes a beautiful moment of affirmation. It invites a visualization: water, flowing in the river; Jesus, as he is baptized and prays, is immersed in the water, and the Holy Spirit descends upon him in the bodily form of a dove. Perhaps the people there are seeing the Spirit in the shape of a dove by the illumined illusion that the bright

and splendid sunshine creates as it blinds their reality-bound eye-sight as it becomes a spiritual one. Not only visualization, today's scripture employs a Dolby Audio Stereo from heaven. The Creator affirms the identity of Jesus in voice, saying, "You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." This statement conveys three elements: the relationship of Jesus and the Creator is familiar, of the parent and the child. The love between them is affirmed to be true: To each other, they are the Beloveds. The third element is that we will find many more affirming moments in which God will be "well pleased" with Jesus, who he is and what he does. The affirmation expressed here creates anticipation and curiosity among us to witness who Jesus is and what his ministry will be like. It is an exciting introduction to Jesus' ministry.

Affirmation is a very active form of action that does not just express approval, nodding or saying yes to someone or a situation. It is more than that. It also enables, invites and helps us anticipate the potential and goodness to be shown, to grow and to influence others. The baptism of Jesus does that in today's Gospel. God is in the very positive state of being pleased, dreaming, promising that God's vision and love for the world is going to bloom like well-leavened bread which will feed God's people through Jesus, the Christ.

Today's Gospel is the song of affirmation at Jesus' baptism. Baptism is about affirming that there is something sacred about life and that a piece of that sacred goodness is found deep within us. It acknowledges a new beginning, as did the birth of Jesus. We hear the affirmation in the words "You are my Child, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). The words of affirmation, the gift of affirmation is spoken to us as well as to Jesus.

These words affirm the life within and that it is good. When God affirms us, we can affirm others — just as when Jesus was affirmed by God so that he could do the same. When we feel affirmed, we feel as though we can be part of the community in all of its aspects, such as stewardship and discipleship. When we feel affirmation, we can give of ourselves and go deeper into our faith because we feel safe to do so.

In our baptism, as in the baptism of Jesus, we celebrate that we are loved—a love that comes before anything we may have done and anything we have yet to do.

Baptism, as an opportunity to affirm one another, is what was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the mark of a new beginning. A new birth. When we are blessed to be in the presence of one who is being baptized, we also remember our own goodness and we recall that God affirms us every morning that we open our eyes and see the goodness that is God's world.

This year, Immanuel's Stewardship Campaign will go side by side with the evolvment of the season of Epiphany.

What do we expect a gift of Epiphany to be? Is the gift something we want or something we need? Do we expect it to be fancy like the wrapping (i.e. the gift box of Children's Time)? In both giving and receiving a gift, we are changed when we are grateful. Just as the lives of the Magi were changed by giving their best gifts to Jesus (Why does a baby need myrrh anyway?), so our lives are changed when we give the best of what we have. When we see gifts like water as gifts that change us, we are transformed and can see that these gifts are for everyone.

What are/would be/could be the gifts of Epiphany for you, for our faith community, Immanuel, and for the world? Let us continue to discover, affirm, and share in this season of Epiphany. As a baptizing church, loved and affirmed by God, we too are called to the journey of Magi, the journey of affirmation, the journey of stewardship and discipleship, to generously share what we have, in gratitude to God.

May it be so. Amen.

Commissioning/Blessing of the Finance Committee/Stewardship Team
with the virtual Laying on of Hands:

May your work on behalf of Immanuel community of faith be fruitful.

May generosity pervade every area of our lives; of your lives.

May we find new ways to share abundantly with our neighbours.

We are grateful for your caring, your vision, and your leadership.

Thank you.

May you be blessed and held in God's grace as you hold the vision for this campaign. Amen.

Hymn: MV 161 *I Have Called You By Your Name*

Stewardship Story: Worship Cluster

Worship at Immanuel is central to us as a congregation and each of us has a part to play whether we are on online, in person or at home. For most of the year we were worshipping on zoom until the fall when we felt it was safe to meet as a congregation due to vaccinations. This meant our greeters were all of you as you as you greeted each other on zoom each Sunday, you were the coffee makers as

you brought your own coffee (or other drinks) to worship, you were the ones to gather your own communion elements, you were the ones to send virtual hugs and you were the ones who were patient as we figured out the technology needed to have worship on line. You were the scripture readers, responsive readers and prayer writers. For those who were not on zoom, a delivery team delivered worship packages to help us all stay connected.

When we were able to gather in small groups, our choir was able to lead us with singing hymns and sharing the anthem with Peter's accompaniment by pre recording music to share on zoom. This enriched our worship experience. During lent, we explored Black History month and in May we explored Asian History month. In the fall, we started to gather in person and continued to offer worship on zoom. This required another learning curve for Ha Na and volunteers to figure out how to make both in person and zoom worship meaningful at the same time. To ensure the safety of our congregation, we required people who attended worship in person to show their QR codes which required a greeter or two at the door. At our Pre-Advent gathering we sang carols, made crafts and drank cider. Last year for Advent the Journey to Bethlehem labyrinth was created by a group of artists in our congregation. A highlight for Advent this year was we were able to experience the labyrinth in person as a group of volunteers created it for us in our sanctuary.

One thing Covid has shown us is that we are adaptable on short notice as we quickly changed from in person and zoom worship on Christmas Eve to just zoom worship for safety. We will continue to worship on zoom only and deliver worship packages until it is safe to meet again in person.

Worship, whether in person, online or at home, is what nurtures and sustains us at Immanuel. Thanks to the many hands who make this happen.

Offering Invitation:

Thank you, Worship Elders, choir members and music leaders, volunteers and all who have participated in worship in many ways. We are indeed recipients of God's grace and generosity. God loves us and affirms us. But, in receiving, we are also called to give, to share, and to live lives of gratitude. Baptism reminds us that ordinary gifts can do extraordinary things. Baptism inspires us to use our gifts not knowing how they might transform. Our offerings of time, talent, and

money will gratefully be received. Now is the opportunity to share your gifts to further the work of Immanuel United Church and the Spirit's task.

Introducing Immanuel's Mission and Service Enthusiast and the first M & S video:

Please watch: Every person is a Super hero: Esbikenh's story

(<https://youtu.be/FUGn8HlqDMs>)

MV 191 *What Can I Do?*

What can I do? What can I bring?

What can I say? What can I sing?

I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.

I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.

(followed by)

MV 196 *We Will Take What You Offer*

We will take what you offer, we will live by your word;

We will love one another and be fed by you, God. (X2)

Prayer:

Gracious God, bless what we offer this day. These gifts, though ordinary, are given in response to your extraordinary love for us. Through your Spirit, may these gifts be transformed to reveal your extraordinary love and may your love be shared in all that we say and do. Amen.

Prayers of the People:

God of Mystery and Light, we come to you this day in awe and wonder at your beauty and your ability to create and recreate all that swirls around us.

You call us to be in covenant with you—to know and receive your love and to give it back to all creation, to each other, and to you. Envelop us this day, surrounding us in the safety that is the knowledge that your Spirit is with us as we seek to follow the path of Christ.

So much of your world is lost this day.

People are lost to each other.

Children are lost from their parents and caregivers.

Men and women are lost in their struggle with drugs and alcohol.

Families are lost because of disagreement, unemployment, and heartbreak.

Countries are lost in the dust of war; refugees cry out in their loss of home and loss of safety.

But yet, your light shines wherever we are, searching us out as a lighthouse searches for a ship at sea. Your grace reminds us that we are worthy to be named—even if you must name and rename us so that we hear you calling to us. We are affirmed before we ask for affirmation. May we live in awe and wonder at this reality.

This day, we lift up those in our community...

Enable us to be the ones who help others to hear their name being called, to receive your love, your hope, and your Spirit of Peace.

We thank you that you have given us hands that can reach out, eyes that see deep beneath the surface, ears that hear truth, mouths that speak justice, and hearts that open wide to give and receive your love. Thank you for the will to try again when we fail, when we fall, when we need to learn from you and from each other.

Send your Spirit once again to help us use these gifts for the betterment of your world and the coming of your kin_dom. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Hymn: MV 145 *Draw the Circle Wide*

Commissioning and Benediction:

We have heard the words of the prophet: Do not fear!

As we go, may we go with courage!

We have heard the story of Jesus' baptism.

As we go, may we hear our name as a gift.

Amen.