

First Sunday of Epiphany  
Immanuel United Church  
Jan 9th, 2022

Welcome

Lighting of Christ Candle:

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

Call to Worship: *(based on Isaiah 60:1-6)*

Arise! Shine!

**For our Light has come!**

The glory of God is in this place.

**The glory of God is in you, in me.**

See! Be radiant!

**Our hearts thrill and rejoice!**

Let us worship in gratitude, in joy, together.

Epiphany Prayer:

**God is creating new paths and possibilities,  
as we prepare for where we are going.**

**Christ is freeing us with newfound love and grace,  
as we learn from where we have been.**

**The Spirit is revealing new dreams to guide us,  
as we start our journey home on a new path.**

**We take courage in the assurance that God goes with us;  
we affirm our call to go where Christ leads; and**

**we trust the Spirit to guide us through the challenging space between,  
where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.**

**Surely, we are not alone.**

**Thanks be to God.**

—adapted from Prayer for Times of Change, The United Church of Canada

Hymn: VU 79 *Arise, Your Light Is Come*

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise ones 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 ones 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.

The anthem: Dona Nobis

Reflection: Exploring the Epiphany

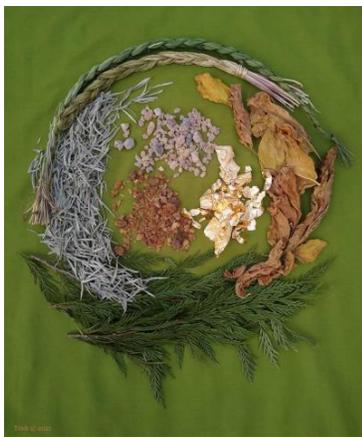
For busy parents, sleep is precious. A few days before Jah-bi turned 11 years old on January 4th, I told him, officially and solemnly: “Do not disturb” your parents after they go to sleep. Of course, I said it with a smile, and encouragement and affirmation that he has grown so wonderfully independent! Jah-bi was respectful of our wish.

Then, on the eve of his birthday, he knocked on the door of our bedroom after 10 pm. “Mom, I need to show you something,” he whispered. “I found Orion! You need to come and see!”

There. I saw the hunter’s three-star belt emblazoned on the night sky in the South. Orion, the key to the winter sky. Jah-bi and I have loved to spot it, to welcome its appearance since we were taught how to find it from the Riding Mountain National Park interpreter three winters ago, on the horizon of frozen Clear Lake!

Like exploring the winter night sky, I invite you to explore Epiphany and wonder what we will find inside the Epiphany box (Note: it will be the metaphor for Children's Time, next Sunday: Exploring the Epiphany Box.) What are the gifts 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 to not just the appearing of the light from an unexpected quarter of the sky, but to God's plan, dream, the grace that God reveals to the world through the epiphany of Christ! Traditionally, we celebrate this event each year on January 6th.



(The photo: Epiphany – Gifts of the Spirit and Gifts of the Wise Men (clockwise from right): Tobacco, Cedar, Sage, Sweetgrass, Gold, Myrrh and Frankincense. Credit: Trish 2021)

In The Creator's Abundant Gifts (<https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/creators-abundant-gifts>) The Rev. John Snow Jr, an Indigenous Minister in the Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the United Church, offers an Indigenous perspective on the season of Epiphany and the sharing of God's sacred gifts. He tells us of the Epiphany - a sacred moment in the every-day - when guided by a star, wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem to search for the newborn King of the Jews. "The scribes tell King Herod that he is "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet." And so, travelling onward to Bethlehem, the wise men find the Christ Jesus and witness the revelation of the Divine God in human form. They are overwhelmed with joy, kneel down to worship him, and open their treasure chests to offer him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What a celebration it must have been at last, for those weary travellers who came from afar! God's sacred gifts."

Rev. Snow continues, "And like the wise men, '...having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,' we also value the guidance we receive from the Creator in the form of visions and dreams."

Rev. Snow participated in a "Come and See" tour of Israel and Palestine in 2017. When he returned home from his tour of the Holy Land, he was so glad to be able to share his

experience and gifts with his parish in Maskwacis. His tour group visited Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and on this pilgrimage, he was in awe at being able to walk on the same soil as Christ, and to come to a more visceral understanding of the land. “We had many interactions with the local people, and discussions elicited both disparities and commonalities.” In the next year, with his partner, he prepared for the congregation the gifts of the wise men — frankincense and myrrh he bought at the tour — along with their Indigenous gifts of the Spirit. Rev Snow says, “We felt emotional that these can co-exist. It was a form of reconciliation and was very well received. Within our Indigenous worship services, we light a candle and we smudge. For me, implementing reconciliation means that we can practice Christianity along with our cultural and spiritual ways.”

Here are Snow’s questions for us to ponder: “If Jesus had been born right here and now, what would be our gifts to honour him? Perhaps we would give him gifts of salt, tea, precious metals, and jewels – or even chocolate, flowers, electronics or money. Perhaps something homemade? Something for enjoyment, as with the little drummer boy? Or would it be something of service?”

We are going through many difficulties again with the Omicron variant spreading quickly and more deeply into our ordinary day to day lives. Last October I was thrilled to go back to church and worship with you in person, and I said, “Finally, we are back to worship in-person!”

In the depths of winter, it is spiritually, emotionally and physically draining and depleting to think and say, “Again, we are back to Zoom for worship.”

In April, 2020, when we were able to equip ourselves with Zoom technology to create the platform of worship to be “Still connected, while physically separated” at the start of the Pandemic, nearly two years ago, Zoom was our Orion: a welcome sight in a difficult season. At that time, I operated on gratitude. We were all grateful for this connective technology! It is different now. Coming back to Zoom as the only option that enables us to gather for worship is not the same as the experience in 2020 when we promptly jumped on this technological spaceship and launched a new, safe way of worship!

It feels like a backstep for us that worship on Zoom will be happening for the next 5 Sundays (at least). However, regardless, let us, supporting each other in every way possible, hold onto the faith, hope, joy and wonder of Epiphany. Good news is still good, no matter how it is delivered. Like the joy of my son who decided to wake up his parents, in spite of his parent’s (like the dream speaking to the Wise Ones) solemn

warning of “Do not disturb”. He couldn’t keep the news to himself alone after finding the light of Orion appearing in the south. Let’s look for and explore the Epiphany joy and wonder what gifts we will still discover, when we know that we are, each and every one of us, loved permanently, unconditionally, in all circumstances, with the immeasurable certainty of God’s love.

We are all experiencing struggles in this coronavirus pandemic. Now we have counted it: Omicron is the fourth wave breaking upon us. However, I have evidence-based belief, hope, and faith, by witnessing how Immanuel has always shared love and care for one another in spite of challenges. Let us gather around the birth of Jesus, the astounding appearance of God’s light. Let us find ways to treasure and share gifts. Praise, encourage, listen, be thankful. Be hopeful. Be kind. Look after one another. Love one another. And keep praying...

May the gifts of Epiphany lift you up! Arise! Shine.  
The glory of God is in you, in me. See! Be as radiant and faithful as Orion, our companion through this challenging season.

Hymn: VU 371 *Open My Eyes that I May See*

Invitation to the Offering:

Moved by your love of us, and grateful for our blessings, let us take up our offering with joy and a generosity of spirit.

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:

**Great giver of gifts, bless what we offer this day. Through your Spirit, may all that we offer be transformed and, along with us, help continue the ministry to which you have called us. May all that is given truly enable your mission of inclusive love to transform and serve your world.**

Communion:

The Holy One be with you

**And also with you**

Open your hearts to the One who is Love

**We open our hearts to you, O God**

Let us give thanks to God, who welcomes the stranger

**To the One who reaches across every border, we give thanks and praise**

In wonder of your expansive embrace, we give you praise, O God. Through your radical welcome, you reveal the limitations of our own imaginations. You break down walls and boundaries we don't even realize we have erected.

**Like the magi guided by the light of star through foreign territory, you call us all towards you. Gathered in your presence, we come to recognize the gifts of community rich in diversity.**

Therefore we join our voices with your people on earth and all the company of the heavens, singing praise to you,

**Holy, Holy, Holy One**

**God of justice and love**

**Heaven and earth are full of your wonder**

**Hosanna among us**

You move in mysterious way, O God. This journey with you is filled with more questions than answers. Each time we think we have you figured out, you surprise us again, revealing yourself in new ways.

In Jesus, we saw your radical welcome of strangers extended in challenging ways. Ways that disrupt our traditions and unsettle our comfort zones.

Jesus broke religious rules in order to include all people.

He lifted up the sacredness of the people and places deemed unclean.

He cared more about the well-being of the oppressed than his own reputation.

**Jesus taught us to rethink your presence among us, but we couldn't accept it.  
Resistant to transformation, your people sent him to the cross.**

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions.

He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said:

**"This is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me."**

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying:  
**"This cup that is poured out is the new covenant."**

In remembrance of all you have done to make us whole,  
we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**Christ was birthed among us.  
Christ was killed among us.  
Christ rises again among us.**

May the same Spirit that lifted Christ from the grave be poured out on these gifts. Make this bread and this cup be an extension of your welcome that knows no bounds. Fill us with the courage and faith to join you in the work of tearing down walls that exclude and pointing to the Sacred in the margins.

In collective longing for a taste of your Kindom on earth,  
we join together in echoing the prayer of Jesus:

**Our Creator, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name  
Thy Kindom 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 trespassed against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the Kindom, the power, and the glory for ever.  
Amen.**

Prayer after receiving

**God, this meal we shared together is a remembrance of your radical embrace of the outcast and oppressed. May it strengthen us as we open our minds and hearts to new ways of recognizing your presence among us. Amen.**

Hymn: VU 91 *The First Nowell*

Commissioning and Benediction:

We have heard the words of the prophet: Arise and Shine!

**As we go, may we too Arise and Shine!**

We have heard the story of the Magi sharing their gifts.

**As we go, may our gifts be shared with all.**

Amen