

Where Two or Three are Gathered Together

Worship for Small Assemblies

The Epiphany Season – Year ‘B’

Of the four major seasons of the Church year – Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and Pentecost – only the season of Epiphany and Pentecost have a varying length – all dependent on the date of Easter and its relationship to our calendar. The earlier the date of Easter, the shorter the Epiphany season and the longer the Pentecost season. This year, 2024, has a relatively early Easter – March 31 – hence, the season of Epiphany is accordingly short – only five Sundays after The Feast of the Epiphany (this year kept, in the Sunday cycle, on January 7) culminating with The Transfiguration – this year on February 11, with Ash Wednesday taking place February 14. As we began Year ‘B’ in our three-year lectionary cycle on the first Sunday of Advent, we have also moved from a ‘Matthew’ year to a ‘Mark’ year.

The bookends of the season always are the Baptism of the Lord (January 14) and The Transfiguration, (February 11). Each of these feast days centres on God speaking to Jesus – at his Baptism, where the Spirit speaks to Jesus alone, and on the mountaintop at the Transfiguration, where the Spirit speaks only to Peter, James, and John – Jesus’ companions.

The Epiphany season also is all about revelation and incarnation – from the ‘showing of Jesus as King of the Jews when the Magi appear at the cradle in Bethlehem through to the Feast of the Presentation (Candlemas) on February 2, when Jesus is revealed as Messiah, to the Transfiguration, where he is ‘changed’, revealed as the Child of God.

The Calendar: Some local decisions need to be made about the Sundays – The Feast of the Epiphany is a ‘set’ date – January 6 (twelve days after Christmas) but many (most?) congregations and communities ‘transfer’ it to the nearest Sunday, since it is an important Feast Day

The Readings: Given that we have moved into the ‘Mark’ year of the three-year cycle, the Epiphany season is blessed with all Mark gospel passages, and all from the first Chapter of Mark, moving to the ninth Chapter for Transfiguration. After the very familiar and much loved story of the Magi on Epiphany (Matthew 2.1-12) the Mark gospel passages all deal with the beginning of Jesus’ ministry:

- his baptism (1.4-11),
- his calling people to repentance and his call of his first disciples (1.14-20),
- his casting out demons (1.21-28), and
- his miraculous healing of Simon’s mother-in-law (1.29-39)

Similarly, the OT readings, beginning with the wonderful Isaiah reading (60.1-6) in which glorious light shines through darkness, the Sundays after Epiphany include:

- the first five verses of the first book of the Bible – Genesis – and the giving of light (Gen. 1.1-5)
- the conversion of Nineveh (Jonah 3.1-5,10)
- the raising up of a new prophet like Moses (Deut. 18.15-20)
- the comfort of the Messiah (Is. 40.21-31)

Rich readings of Paul's first letter to the community at Corinth complete this deeply involving season.

Other season considerations: Two significant 'moments' are always contained within the Epiphany season – one biblical, and one 'of' the church. The two saints' days – The Confession of St. Peter (January 18) and The Conversion of St. Paul (January 25) mark the week that invites us to be in prayer for Christian unity. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity involves Christians from all denominations and around the world in coming together in prayer and song – especially important this year, perhaps more than ever. There will be local services to mark this week; an order of service for ecumenical worship can be found at the website of the Canadian Council of Churches (www.councilofchurches.ca). Local communities are encouraged to join with others to pray together. The other is a major feast - The Presentation of the Lord (February 2), also called Candlemas. The readings tell the story of the infant Jesus being brought to the temple and being presented as Messiah. Simeon and Anna both offer praise, and Simeon utters the now famous words of the 'Nunc dimittis' – 'Lord now let your servant go in peace'. Oftentimes, local communities will celebrate with candles burning and will bless candles for use that year. Readings can be found in ELW, p. 55. Some describe Candlemas as the 'third' incarnation story – after Christmas and Epiphany.

The Season: The images both in text and in symbol during Epiphany are 'light' and 'call'. The light of the world has come among us; the incarnate Word of God lives in our midst. Hymns and songs which remind us of our baptism, of our call to discipleship are all most appropriate to the season. The **liturgical colours** are white for Epiphany and The Baptism of the Lord; **green** for the remainder of the Epiphany season, and **white** for Transfiguration.

Texts and Music:

The Epiphany of the Lord (January 7)

Readings: Isaiah 60.1-6; Psalm 72.1-7,10-14; Ephesians 3.1-12; Matthew 2.1-12

Prayer of the Day:

*Almighty and ever-living God, you revealed the incarnation of your Son by the brilliant shining of a star. Shine the light of your justice always in our hearts and over all lands, and accept our lives as the treasure we offer in your praise and for your service, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen***

...or...

*O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen***

...or...

*Creator of the heavens, who led the Magi by a star to worship the Christ-child: guide and sustain us, so that we may find our journey's end in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

Hymns and Songs:

Brightest and Best – ELW 303

O Morning Star – ELW 308

When a Star is Shining – ACS 915

Preaching/Reflecting:

What gifts do we bring ‘to lay before the King’??

How does the light get in?

‘Epiphany’ means ‘a manifestation’ or ‘a moment when you suddenly feel that you understand’ – how, if at all, does that resonate with you, with our community?

The Baptism of the Lord (January 14)

Readings: Genesis 1.1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19.1-7; Mark 1.4-11

Prayer of the Day:

Holy God, creator of light and giver of goodness, your voice moves over the waters. Immerse us in your grace, and transform us by your Spirit, that we may your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lies and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Or

God of the heavens, whose holiness is unveiled by one who is submerged in all the pain and sin of the earth: give us faith to follow him who goes to the heart of darkness bearing only the Spirit of gentle, insistent peace; through Jesus Christ, the promised one. Amen

Hymns and Songs:

Christ, When for us You Were Baptized – ELW 304

Wash, O God, our Sons and Daughters - ELW 445

Shall We Gather at the River – ELW 423

Take Me to the Water – ACS 957

Preaching/Reflecting:

Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

What does ‘participating’ in His baptism mean?

Worthiness and unworthiness seem to be themes – how do those words make us feel? What do we do with those feelings??

Third Sunday after Epiphany (January 21)

Readings: Jonah 3.1-5,10; Psalm 62.5-12; 1 Cor. 7.29-31; Mark 1.14-20

Prayer of the Day:

*Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen***

Or

*God of salvation, the splendour of your glory dispels the darkness of earth, for in Christ we see the nearness of your kingdom. Now make us quick to follow him, and eager to proclaim the good news of the gospel. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen***

Hymns and Songs:

There's a Wideness in God's Mercy – ELW 588

Jesus Calls Us – ELW 696

Go to the World - ACS 991

O Jesus I Have Promised – ELW 503

Preaching/Reflecting:

Like Andrew, we are called to 'follow' Jesus. What does that mean for us in 2024?

Are we co-creators of a 'new world'? How do we do that?

The psalmist says: 'May the Lord give strength to his people'. What strength do we need for today?

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (January 28)

Readings: Deut. 18.15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Cor. 8.1-13; Mark 1.21-28

Prayer of the Day:

*Compassionate God, you gather the whole universe into your radiant presence and continually reveal your Son as our Saviour. Bring wholeness to all that is broken and speak truth to us in our confusion, that all creation will see and know your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.***

Or

*God our creator, who in the beginning commanded the light to shine out of the darkness: we pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ may shine into the hearts of all your people, and reveal the knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.***

Hymns and Songs:

Cast Out, O Christ – ACS 1016

There is a Balm in Gilead – ELW 614

O God of Light – ELW 507

Jesus Shall Reign – ELW 434

Preaching/Reflecting:

What are our demons? Do we name them?

What does 'teaching with authority' mean in the church today?

'I will raise up for them a prophet..I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet' (Deut). What is the prophetic word for today? Who is saying that word?

The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany (February 4)

Readings: Isaiah 40.21-31; Psalm 147.1-11; 1 Cor. 9.16-23; Mark 1.29-39

Prayer of the Day:

*Everlasting God, you give strength to the weak and power to the faint. Make us agents of your healing and wholeness, that your good news may be known to the ends of your creation, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.***

Or

*Almighty God, by whose grace alone we are accepted and called to your service: strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.***

Hymns and Songs:

Praise the One who Breaks the Darkness – ELW 843

Precious Lord, Take My Hand – ELW 773

You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord – ELW 787

When Memory Fades – ELW 792

Preaching/Reflecting:

The church is called on to be a healing place – how do we do that?

What places in our lives need the message proclaimed?

God empowers the fainthearted and strengthens the powerless...

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (February 11)

Readings: 2 Kings 2.1-12; Psalm 50.1-6; 2 Cor. 4.3-6; Mark 9.2-9

Prayer of the Day:

*Almighty God, the resplendent light of your truth shines from the mountaintop into our hearts. Transfigure us by your beloved Son, and illumine our world with your image, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.***

Or

*God of glory, by the grace of your Spirit, reveal your Son to us now in the message of the prophets and in the witness of the apostles, so that we may heed his voice and receive him in faith. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen***

Hymns and Songs:

Dazzling Presence on the Mountain – ACS 917

Jesus on the Mountain Peak – ELW 317

How Good, Lord, to be Here – ELW 315

Beautiful Saviour – ELW 838

Preaching/Reflecting:

In what ways, if any, have you been ‘transfigured’ in your life, or have you seen transfiguration in others?

Why does Jesus tell the others not to tell of this experience until after the Resurrection?

The Elijah-Elisha story in 2 Kings tells of another kind of transfiguration and ascension. Why is it included in today’s readings?

How do we become light ‘shining out of darkness’?

What good news do we proclaim to the world because of today?

Beginning with The Epiphany of Jesus as a King, through his baptism and early ministry, we come to the vision of his transfiguration. The light of God’s glory enlightens us through baptism and shines in us for others to see. And so, we come through the Epiphany season prepared to enter into Lent this coming week!

ELW – Evangelical Lutheran Worship

ACS – All Creation Sings

The Very Rev. Peter Wall

Assistant to the Bishop, Worship

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