

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

January 3, 2021 ABC

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *O Light of Lights, you showed forth the light of God's love to all nations. In your coming, God's saving love is revealed from east to west. You have made us share in the promise of salvation. Illuminate our minds and hearts with your love. May we, like the Magi, always seek and search for you. Enlighten us as we contemplate your Word today. We pray in your light and in your love. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: Epiphany means manifestation. On this Sunday, the Church invites us to celebrate God's universal plan to save *all* people – as well as Jews.

Let us listen to God's word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm and the Second Reading pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 60:1-6

This reading is from Third Isaiah (chs 56-66). Our post-Babylonia exile prophet seeks to offer hope to the returned exiles who are dealing with a demolished land and city. He seeks to encourage them as they embark on rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and the Temple.

*"Rise up Jerusalem! Your Light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you."*

The life of the returned exiles is extremely difficult.

*"See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the people."*

God is still with his chosen people.

*"Upon you the Lord shines
and over you appears his glory."*

This light of God will draw nations to Jerusalem just as the Star drew the Magi to Bethlehem.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 72

"Lord, every nation on earth will adore you," speaks of God's universal plan to save all people, thereby connecting this Psalm to the overall theme of this Sunday's readings.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6

Paul's message about his special mission to bring the Good news to the Gentiles connects this reading with the general theme of the day. Jesus reveals to Paul and the Apostles that the equality of Jews and Gentiles figures in God's plan of salvation.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matthew 2:1-12

As we listen to this First Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this Second Reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:1-12

The Gospel is the fulfillment of the First Reading, which speaks of all the nations streaming to Jerusalem bearing gifts for the new King. The Magi represent the non-Jewish world who are seekers of God in their own way. The Magi's *journey* to Bethlehem in search of the new King is symbolic of the journey all seekers must take. Thus, Epiphany is not only a feast on which we

celebrate God's manifestation of himself to the Gentile world, but also our movement toward God.

When Matthew is writing his Gospel in 80AD, his own people have almost totally *rejected* Jesus while large groups of Gentiles are *accepting* him. This rejection/acceptance dynamic is present in today's Gospel. While Herod's plot to kill Jesus symbolizes Israel's *rejection* of Jesus, the Magi's *acceptance* of Jesus symbolizes the Gentiles' movement toward Jesus. This rejection/acceptance dynamic will be played out many times in Matthew's Gospel. While the Pharisees will close their hearts to Jesus, the Gentiles will open their hearts to him.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. The Magi symbolize our search for God and meaning in life. What gives meaning to your life? Has some recent discovery or new passion brought new meaning and depth to your life?
3. In the Epiphany, Jesus is manifested to the Magi and Gentile world. Can you name a recent epiphany experience in your life, a recent discovery?
4. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: This week, become more aware of Jesus' desire to use you to be a light to others.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it; take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *"Thank you, Jesus, for revealing yourself to me. Help me in word and deed to be a revelation of your life and love to others."*

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? What are you grateful for? For what and for whom do you wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes are home
When shepherds are back with their flocks
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the captives
To rebuild nations
To bring peace among peoples
To make music in the heart.*

-Howard Thurman