

January 6, 2019 Epiphany
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12

Arise, shine, for your light has come... your light has come.

Today we celebrate the feast of Epiphany.

In our first reading, looking forward to the time after exile,

Isaiah prophesies to a once heartbroken community with those words of comfort, and encouragement, and renewed momentum:

“Arise, shine, your light has come, and God’s glory has risen, finally risen, upon you.”

On Christmas Eve, in the Gospel, we heard about the angels and the shepherds.

Today we heard Matthew’s rendition of the ancient story replete with

astrologers following a bright star,
and Herod’s insecurities on high alert.

Herod the King is frightened, threatened, shaken.

This baby is a threat to the oppressive tactics of which Herod was all too fond.

God, it seems, is showing the world—very physically—a whole new way of salvation.

Epiphany literally means manifestation, to show, to reveal.

As in, God is revealed in Jesus.

As in, sorry Herod, but your instincts are correct, this baby Jesus will live and die and rise
to reveal vulnerability and power and resistance in a whole new way.

As in, Christ’s light is revealed in you, and in me, and in this community.

As in, darkness doesn’t overcome, the Christ-light shines and its reflection changes everything.

Today I invite you into holy movement, all around our worship space.

Some of you have participated in this active Sunday before,

some of the opportunities will be familiar, others will be new.

Let me introduce you to these stations and then, I pray, you will participate as you feel led.

“At this first station, we remember that Herod’s first reaction

to a new power for peace, for justice in the world...was anger, and fear.

This kind of fear fuels violence and causes suffering, still today.

Under threat to their very lives, the holy family fled to Egypt as refugees.

Herod was so worried about the birth of Jesus, he ordered the slaughter of all the baby boys in the region.

Here, at this station, around the map, let us pray for the world, and for its powers,
for the fears and hopes that live within us all,
for immigrants and refugees,
and each of us caught in this power.

Use this wall map to focus your prayers, add notes with names and situations we pray for:

Families and children at the southern border, for instance.

Places of conflict; our prayers are part of our resistance.

You can also add to the map names of those who are far away, students away for the semester,
communities you have loved, others you hold close.

Here: Pastor Barbara and Ann Agrimson for offering healing prayer today.

You can come to one of them and stand, or kneel, and they'll pray with you.

Or you can pray at the communion rail yourself.

This week someone was talking about the praying for revelation, for clarity.

That's a great prayer: ask God to help show us the way.

Here are candles for lighting as we add our prayers, trusting the light.

Over here we remember that light itself is at the center of this story.

And it's Christ's light that shines within and through each of us.

The magi show us how to journey toward the light with courage and deep hope,

how to go with joy, how to follow a star, how to live in dark times kindling Christ's light.

Stop here, at this station, to make a small candle lantern.

And then take it home, and use it to center your soul.

Today we lift up our bread oven ministry.

With simple things like flour, salt, water and a bit of yeast, with loving hands and energy,

with a sturdy and safe oven, Bread is formed, God's love is revealed.

Around bread we share meals and gather community.

By grace at the table we are forgiven and blest, our hunger nourished.

Stop at this station to knead a small lump of bread dough into a small loaf.

Take it home to bake and share, and let God's love be revealed.

At this station, we remember the gifts the magi brought to the child.

Strange gifts, frankincense, myrrh, gold, more like weighty burdens, especially for a baby.

Gifts that represented healing, death and embalming, royalty.

We too, carry burdens, baggage, and gifts.

There are rocks at this station.

I invite you to pick up one and let it symbolize the burdens you're carrying—feel it's weight.

You can place the rock in the baptismal waters, trusting God's promises to hold you, and all that you carry.

Or you can take the rock with you if it is a burden you need to simply name and carry onward.

While you are at the baptismal font, dip into the baptismal waters, remember the forgiveness,

the new life, the healing, and identity of this water—water that will never let you go.

Remember, You are a beloved child of God, a brightly shining child of God.

Over here, there are prompts for conversations with a partner, or some reflection on your own.

Matthew says that the magi were warned in a dream and they returned to their country by another way—

there is this interwoven sense of spirituality and politics and action.

I'm thinking about our core beliefs, about dreams and visions, and about strategy and intentions.

These questions prompt us into reflection and faithful action.

At these doors, way back here, learn more about the Epiphany practice of Chalking your door,

and blessing your home.

This is a meaningful way to begin the new year and there is a short liturgy to help you in the practice.

At these doors, we remember that the magi are threshold characters.

At the doorway, we honor the thresholds, the crossroads, at which we find ourselves.

We reflect on the past. We look to the future. And we seek God's blessing.

Write on a star the blessing you seek for a new year, and tape it to the doorframe."

Lots of options, visit a station or two or more.

Or simply remain in your pew—to pray and reflect.

The music of our hymn of the day will call us back together.

Arise, shine: May God bless our holy movement and our prayer.