

**JANUARY 2, 2022
EPIPHANY SUNDAY**



**St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights,
IL
397-6323
Rev. Rosemary Captain**

This is communion Sunday so have your bread
and cup ready.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We gather wondering,
“Where will we find the Babe
born in Bethlehem?”

**We will find the Babe
in the laughter of children,
in the wisdom of grandparents.**

We gather asking,
“where will we find
the Child of Christmas?”

**We will find the Child
where the needy are gifted with hope,
where the oppressed are set free.**

We gather wanting to know,
“where will we find the Christ
who has come for us?”

**We will find our Hope
where fear is overwhelmed by grace,
where hatred is overwhelmed by love,
where all people are overwhelmed by joy.**

***CALL TO RECONCILIATION:**

Why do we huddle in the shadowed corners of life,
rather than running to the Light of life? Why do we

love the wrong we do rather than grasping the good news offered to us? As we struggle with such questions, let us speak to God of all we have failed to do, seeking hope and grace as we pray,

UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:

Emmanuel, all children are holy, and we have failed to give them dreams of hope, paths to safety, places of shelter from fear and violence.

Forgive us when we ignore children in our neighborhoods and on our newsfeeds who face modern herod-dangers.

Lead us this new year to find magi-resources, map the journeys to possibility, and welcome all who need a safe place, for we pray in the name of any frightened child of Bethlehem. Amen

(Moment of silence for personal confession)

ASSURANCE OF GRACE: (responsive)

The dream came, there was enough gold for a fresh donkey, the moon shone on the desert.

God forgives us when we put hands over our ears because we are so tired of weeping for our own past year.

God gives us courage to help the most vulnerable in our world in the year to come.

All: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 2:1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. ²They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

³When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. ⁴He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶*You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel.”*^[a]

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” ⁹When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead

of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.”

Hear the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE:

“Why is the visit by the Magi Significant?”

The story of the three Magi visiting Baby Jesus is only found in the Gospel of Matthew. In this month’s newsletter I give some information on who the Magi were. Now we’ll talk about the gifts they brought, as written by Rev. William Barclay.

“From very early times, the gifts the wise men brought have been seen as particularly fitting. Each gift has been seen as representing something which specially matched some characteristic of Jesus and his work.

(1) *Gold is the gift of a king.* Seneca, the Roman philosopher, tells us that in Parthia it was the

custom that no one could approach the king without a gift. And gold, the king of metals, is the fit gift for a king.

So, Jesus was the ‘Man born to be King’. But he was to reign not by force but by love; and he was to rule over human hearts, not from a throne, but from a cross. We do well to remember that Jesus Christ is King. We can never meet Jesus on equal terms. We must always meet him on terms of complete submission. (*As the saying goes, let go and let God.*) Before we can be friends with Christ, we must submit to Christ.

(2) *Frankincense is the gift for a priest.* It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for men and women. The Latin word for *priest* is *pontifex*, which means a *bridge-builder*. The priest is the one who builds a bridge between human beings and God.

That is what Jesus did. He opened the way to God; he made it possible for us to enter into the very presence of God.

(3) *Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die.* Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came into the world to die. Jesus also came into the world to live for men and women, and, in the end, to die for them. He came to give for us his life and his death.

“Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die – these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true king, the perfect high priest, and in the end the supreme Savior of the world”

I guess that’s why we call them “Wise Men”. They knew what the future would hold for this Baby, and they were preparing the Holy Family for the outcomes. And Jesus teaches us our future depending on what we believe and what we do.
Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

God of the stars. God of the day and God of the night. We marvel at your creations in our world and in our lives. God created everything so that we may live to be servants to others. Jesus is our teacher, but

we have not always learned our lessons well. We have failed many times. Have mercy on us, gracious God.

There are many in the world who need so much; food, water, and shelter. Where do we begin to help? The food pantry is one place. Clothing drives is another. And we can financially help charities or volunteer to help these charities. We are not without ways to help. The blessings you have given each of us, dear Lord, we should share.

Another way to help is to pray for those people and others such as those on our prayer list. Bring your love and comfort to all as we share the prayer your son gave us . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

Written by Maren Tirabassi

INVITATION TO COMMUNION (responsive)

Come from your still nights and morning oases.

We come with the hopes and fears of long years and brief days. We come with road dust and star dust with gifts always inadequate but always needing to be given away.

Come with the need for peace of mind and peace on earth.

We come to the Bread and Cup, speaking Star words with our lips wanting to run away from so many dangers.

Come to Bethlehem remembered,
but hold in prayer the sorrows of Bethlehem today.

We come for Emmanuel – God with us in journey and shelter.

WORDS OF REMEMBERING:

We remember today a Child born to change everything and the endangerment of many children, and we remember that the baby named Jesus, grew up to help people in their hurting and loss, traveled as many roads as we do, and taught us with simple words we can understand, and stories we come to many times to find new meaning.

We remember that there are six miles between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and some thirty years between the magi visit and a Passover meal when

Jesus blessed a new royal gift – Bread of hope and a Cup of love poured freely.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONSECRATION:

Emmanuel, God you are with us, in our lonely nights, and following so-distant stars.

We carry all our old years and open our new one, always hoping, for an oasis for each of us and a blessing on earth, in the form of bread in our hands, and the cup we lift.

May this Bread and Cup be so sacred we never lose the Star's shine, ignore the new year and new chance embedded in every day, or forget Christ who calls us to sharing and joy. Amen

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS:

Let us share the bread.

It is the gift that reminds us of our gifts.

Let us drink deeply.

So that we may always travel on.

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

God, we give thanks that you come to us as Epiphany, in Bread and Cup, in old story and your answer to each of our hopes, need for peace, longing for joy, commitment to love. You have filled

us so we may share the good tidings all the year-long. Amen

BENEDICTION:

Go forth and share grace upon grace upon grace in likeness of our Sovereign, Jesus the Christ. Share grace over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every person you encounter. Be as Christ. Amen.

PRAYER LIST:

Condolences to Rosemary Williams on the death of her niece, Gerri Riggle.