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Straight from the "Hart"

January 7, 2024 -- Epiphany

"Responding to the King"



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

Welcome

In honor of Epiphany that we celebrate today – the story of the people who traveled from the east – they are called Magi, Wise Men, Scholars, Kings, and a few other things – It is day they arrived to see Jesus, God's gift to the world. Listen to the Psalmist prayer for God's chosen King ---

God, give the king your justice, the royal son with your righteousness so that he can govern your people rightly and your afflicted ones with justice...May they revere you as long as the sun endures, ... through all the generations. May he be like... showers watering the earth. In his days, may the good flourish and peace abound till the moon is no more... May those who dwell in the wilderness bow before him... May all the kings offer him gifts, bow down before him and all the nations serve him.

From Psalm 72:1-2,5-7,9a,10b-11 (NIV, CJB, VOICE, TLB)

They gave in order to honor and worship him and to participate in perpetuating the ongoing prosperity of his rule on this earth. And those are some of the same reasons we still give today.

Opening Prayer

Lord, as we gather today, we join the wise men in their wondering, 'Where will we find the God's Babe, the Child of Christmas in this world?'

We find his hope where fear is overwhelmed by grace, where hatred is overwhelmed by love, where people are overwhelmed by joy. Lord, use us that the needy and the oppressed are set free to experience your hope, love, and joy in Jesus, Amen.

loosely ad.,abr. from a "Call to Worship" by Thomas Shuman,
lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com.

Responsive Call to Worship

R: We come to make the Lord Jesus our heart's desire.

C: We seek him here.

R: We come to have our souls inspired.

C: Our hearts burn with anticipation.

R: We long for his gentle embrace, for his tender, soft-spoken words that bring healing.

C: Our souls will be filled with heaven's peace.

R: We kneel at his feet, offering our adoration and praise.

C: He will bless us with his touch.

R: The Lord embraces us and holds our hand.

C: We stand, encircled by his love.

(Loosely based on "Encircled by Your Love" by Belinda van Rensburg)

Music

On this Epiphany Sunday, when the Magi arrive to see Jesus, we too have come to this place to see him. Let's sing We Would See Jesus.

We Would See Jesus

Words: J. Edgar Park, 1913 Music: Herbert B. Turner, 1907

1. We would see Jesus; lo! his star is shining
above the stable while the angels sing;
There in a manger on the hay reclining;
haste, let us lay our gifts before the King.
2. We would see Jesus, Mary's son most holy,
light of the village life from day to day;
shining revealed through every task most lowly,
the Christ of God, the life, the truth, the way.
4. We would see Jesus, in his work of healing,
at eventide before the sun was set;
divine and human, in his deep revealing
of God made flesh, in loving service met.

Theme

You may be seated. Five weeks ago, we started the Advent Season with the wisemen seeing and star and beginning a journey. Today we return to see the end

of their story and what it triggers in the world. By the way I count, Friday marked the 12th and final official day of the Christmas season and yesterday the season of Epiphany began. Epiphany is always on the 6th, but we celebrate it on the Sunday between Jan 2nd and Jan 8th. Some faith traditions name the first day of the Epiphany season Three Kings Day in honor of the arrival of the Magi. While our tradition often focuses on that story, we simply call it Epiphany.

Epiphany is defined as “the arrival of something”. When we reach a new idea – when the light goes on and we say “Aha!” -- that is an epiphany – the arrival of a new understanding that has developed in our minds. In more formal language, it is the arrival of a dignitary, which leads some people to believe this story is about the arrival of the noble wise kings from the east, and we could say that that is partially true.

But in faith language, it is the manifestation of the divine presence. Manifestation is defined as “an event, action, or object that clearly shows or embodies something, especially a theory or an abstract idea (Oxford Languages) (or I’ll add), something that is hard to see or grasp. So, an ailment manifests itself by its symptoms – that is how you know you are sick, by having sick symptoms. Headaches, sweaty palms, an upset stomach can be a manifestation of inner anxiety for an upcoming event... I think there was some actor or athlete (or both) who threw up before every performance. I’m glad I don’t do that 😊. But it is an obvious manifestation of what they were feeling... The wind can’t be seen, but it lets us know it is there – it manifests itself -- by the odors it carries, by the pressure we feel on our face, especially when it is strong and cold.

Back to our faith context, then... Epiphany isn’t as much about the appearance of the magi, but the appearance of God who is making his presence known more clearly – embodied in the physical life of Jesus, and especially to the non-Jewish world, who the magi represent. Therefore, God makes himself known in this King of the Jews who is now seen as who he really is – the King of the world. Let’s hear the story.

Bible Reading 1

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem village, Judah territory—this was during Herod’s kingship—a band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, “Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the

Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."

When word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified—and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well. Herod lost no time. He gathered all the high priests and religion scholars in the city together and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

They told him, "Bethlehem, Judah territory. The prophet Micah wrote it plainly:

It's you, Bethlehem, in Judah's land,
no longer bringing up the rear.
From you will come the leader
who will shepherd-rule my people, my Israel."

Herod then arranged a secret meeting with the scholars from the East. Pretending to be as devout as they were, he got them to tell him exactly when the birth-announcement star appeared. Then he told them the prophecy about Bethlehem, and said, "Go find this child. Leave no stone unturned. As soon as you find him, send word and I'll join you at once in your worship."

Instructed by the king, they set off. Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies -- a miracle that, of course, overjoyed and enraptured the wise men. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child...

They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their satchels and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

Matthew 2:1-11 (MSG, with VOICE)

Music Today we sing the song that spells out the significance of the three named gifts the Magi brought, each representing a critical role that Jesus fulfilled on earth. (1) Gold, a valuable resource for kings to maintain their throne, represented his royalty. (2) Frankincense, an incense used in Temple worship, represented his Godhood, but also his role as High Priest who formed *thee* bridge representing God to the people, and the people to God. (3) And myrrh, a burial spice that represents his sacrifice on the cross to bring God's final word of salvation for those who would listen and believe – a martyr in the line of faithful prophets before him. Messianic King, High Priest, Sacrificial Prophet. What the song does not tell you is that historically, gold, frankincense, and myrrh were also all used as healing



medicines and salves, and certainly, Jesus Christ was the healer of many physical and spiritual ailments then ---- and now. Let's sing We Three Kings...

We Three Kings

Words-Music: John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1857

1. We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

2. Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.

(Refrain)

3. Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising, worshiping God on high.

(Refrain)

4. Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

(Refrain)

5. Glorious now behold him arise; King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies.

(Refrain)

Music And so they came and offered their gifts as expressions of their hope and their love for this Light who has come to earth. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing I Love, You Lord.

I Love You, Lord

Words – Music: Laurie Klein

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I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you, O my soul rejoice.
Take joy, my King, in what you hear, may it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

Repeat

Prayers

Lord, the reason we are here or tune in each week is because we do love you and want to draw closer to your heart by new epiphanies of understanding about you... or at least, to reinforce and remind ourselves of what we do know, so that our love remains strong and our actions remain faithful.

For we are still people who sometimes walk in the dark, and even in the light, darkness looms large around us. Like anyone else, at any given time, we can be persistently threatened by the onslaught of fear, anxiety, brutality, violence, loss – over a whole wide variety of hurtful events that we cannot manage, much less control. **Petitions** This is why we return to you with our requests, We pray * for the family and friends of Kathy Novak’s mother, Carol Werner, who passed away last Monday, * for the family and friends of one of Randy Bell’s friends who passed away last week, and they are up north for the funeral. * Continue to pray for the healing of Randy Melville, * and Jan Martin, * for those who are under the weather, for those with economic or other kind of challenges, for those places in the world where personal and/or national peace is not the norm, where people are oppressed from a normal life, where the loss of life, or quality of life can turn at any moment. for our church and homes, we lift all these requests up to you, Lord, take them and do with them what you will, and reveal to us that you are fulfilling your promise, that you are with us, and we can be at peace and content in all circumstances even as we strive to make those circumstances more suitable. Bless our efforts.

For we are — we want to be more — people of your light. We pray for the light of your glorious presence, the light of your wondrous grace as we to revitalize us as we exhaust our coping capacity, for your gift of newness that overrides our weariness, we pray that through the dark we can see and know and hear and trust in your good rule. That we may have the energy and courage and freedom to act on your guidance throughout the demands of each day. We bow before you and offer ourselves and our day to you and follow your lead with deep joy and high hope. In Jesus name, Amen.

Portions are loosely ad. from “People of the Light” by Walter Brueggemann in [Prayers for a Privileged People](#); or [journeywithjesus.net](#)

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

We now resume the story. When we left off, the Magi, had presented their meaningful gifts to Jesus. They were warned in a dream not to report back to Herod. They worked out an alternate, discreet route to return to their own county. Then an angel of the Lord warned Joseph in a dream that Herod was seeking to kill the Child, so we was to take Mary and Jesus and go to Egypt until further



notice. Joseph woke his family and they headed to Egypt under to cover of darkness. They lived in Egypt until Herod died. This Egyptian exile fulfilled what the Lord said through the prophet Hosea: “Out of Egypt I called My Son”. Now hear what happens when paranoia and power are combined. Summary of Matthew 2:11-15

Herod, when he realized that the scholars had tricked him, flew into a rage. He commanded the murder of every little boy two years old and under who lived in Bethlehem and its surrounding hills. (He determined that age according to the time which he had determined from the magi.) That’s when Jeremiah’s revelation was fulfilled:

A sound was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much lament.
Rachel weeping for her children,
Rachel refusing to be comforted,
because they were no more.

Later, when Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said: “Get up, take the Child and his mother and go to the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead.”

Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother, and reentered Israel. When he heard, though, that Archelaus, Herod’s oldest and notoriously brutal son had succeeded his father as king in Judea, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned by God in a dream, he decided to go up north in the district of Galilee. On arrival, he settled in the village of Nazareth. And this too was a fulfillment of the prophetic words, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

Matthew 2:16-23 (MSG, with NASB and VOICE)

Music There are very few, if any, *popular* songs that speak of Herod’s horrible acts. But there are a couple verses that we can use to ponder this sad part of the story – and it certainly still applies today. It isn’t an easy song to sing, but let’s do our best to get through it together. Let’s sing God weeps.

God Weeps

Words: Shirley Erena Murray Music: Carlton R. Young
© 1996 Hope Publishing Co.

1. God weeps at love withheld, at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love, God weeps.

4. God waits for stones to melt, for peace to seed,
for hearts to hold each other's need,
until we understand the Christ, God waits.

Sermon Responding to the King

The question Epiphany asks us each year is – how are we going to respond to this King in the manger as he makes his presence known to us this year in 2024? Can you believe it is 2024? I remember thinking, I'm never going to reach the year 2000. It just seemed so far off in the future. Do you remember thinking that? Matthew suggests that there are at least 3 possible responses.

The first response is seen in Herod the Great. He was named Great for a reason. He wielded his power to rebuild Jerusalem and keep order. But as Herod became more powerful, in, granted, a world of treacherous power seekers, he became obsessed with holding on to his power so much that power took hold of him. It is kind of like that toy thing: Do you own your toys or do your toys own you? Well he had power, but his power began to own him. He killed three of his sons, a wife, and a mother. He created charges and arrested some of Jerusalem's most distinguished citizens to be executed when he died, so that there would be mourning in Jerusalem when he died. He would not have a second thought to eliminating anyone who might even be rumored to be a threat to his power. It is no surprise that when the news spread that Herod was disturbed about rumors of a new king being born in the area, that all Jerusalem was disturbed too – not so much because a new king was born, but because of how Herod would react to it, and how that would play out in their lives and in their world.

This is the first response: **proactive rejection**. Herod represents those who see Christ as competition for control -- a negative challenge against self-determination.

We may need to dial it back a bit from Herod's extremism. But are there times in which we resist what God wants to accomplish in our life? Because it is not comfortable? Because it means relinquishing control and giving power to the Spirit's guidance? Because it means giving up things we know we should give up but do not want to give up? Or starting to do something new -- something new we know we should do but don't want to start? Are there times we refuse to rely on God instead of our own wits; because we think we are somehow smarter or more powerful or more resourceful than God is? Whatever form the rationale takes, the bottom line is that -- at least for that particular area of our life to which God is speaking – our answer – probably not spoken out loud or even silently in our brain

– the answer is “No.” Sometimes we do it sadly, feeling defeated -- other times we rationalize the guidance away with doubts, and sometimes -- we do it aggressively and rebelliously. “I will not do it.” (said in the tone of a determined, pouting child). In fear of loss, we reject God’s instruction before we even try to see who he is and what he is about. **Proactive rejection.**

We mentioned 5 weeks ago that Herod may have been paranoid, and I just elaborated on that a little more today, but he wasn’t stupid. We also told you that he knew how to get to the right people to get the answers he needed and wanted. These people he called knew all about the whole story. They had knowledge, they had all the right words, they were living the lives of elite religious authority, but acted as if nothing had happened. While the reasons for this may vary, let’s sum up this response as **disinterested apathy**. They were just too busy, too distracted, too self-driven, too doubt filled, too much else on their own agenda; too -- “something” -- to even bothering to react to news of their Messiah’s arrival. When asked about it, they knew all about it, but they hadn’t done anything.

Sometimes we are so good at the knowledge, the words, the actions, so good at going through the motions that they become meaningless, we hear, but we don’t listen, we hear, but we rationalize away the thought as if it weren’t real, we hear, but everything else -- the plates we are busy spinning gets in the way – do you know what that means when is say spinning plates? In some of these old shows, one act was to set up a bunch of tall sticks and then get plates spinning on the tops of the poles and they would run from one pole to another to keep them spinning so they would not fall down. It became a cliché for “there are so many things I have got to do to keep things going” so much so that we don’t time to do anything but run from one stick to the next and back again, and because of that, we are not listening...

Maybe you heard about the man who thought his wife was losing his hearing and so he snuck up behind her one day and called her "Can you hear me honey?" She did not seem to respond. He moved a step closer, and said a little louder, "Can you hear me honey?" Still no response. He took another step so he was right behind her, and he loudly shouted, "CAN YOU HEAR ME HONEY?" She turned around and said, "For the *third* time -- yes, now what do you want."

We think God isn't hearing or responding to us. But it is we who aren't hearing what he wants us to do, to be, to stop, to start. And because we are not paying attention, and we go about our daily business without his direction. The essence

of the response – at least in the particular area of our life – is that we don't react to the Lord and King's directions because we aren't interested in changing that part of our life. We pretend it is just the same ol' same ol', just like it was yesterday and the day before.... nothing to see here... **Disinterested Apathy.**

Then we find some people who searched the skies, left their normal routine of activities and made a pilgrimage, a quest, asked all around town, and at journey's end, they offer their worship, their praise, and their gifts – their very selves.

I am going to illustrate this one negatively first. Chuck Swindoll once wrote: Before tragedies struck [and people died], we used to laugh at a comment by one of the astronauts. When someone stuck his head inside the capsule before a launch and asked, "Well, how does it feel?" And one of them replied with a grin, "It really makes you think twice when you realize that everything in this whole project was constructed according to the lowest bid."

Some people conduct their lives according to the lowest bid. Not just money, though it includes that. They live their relationships, their religion, their obligations all take the form of in the form of "what is the least I have to pay, the least I have to think, the least I have to do, and yet, they still want to receive primo value out of their minimalist efforts.

I see it on podcasts that talk about dating. And while the details may vary some, both genders complain about the unrealistically high expectations the other gender sets up before they even meet. Minimal height, minimal income level, certain age range, certain physique, the list goes on and on and on -- who pays for what right off the bat -- the list be quite extensive. And the response then, is, "And for all these expectations, what are *you* bringing to the table?" (that seems to be the go-to expression) and the people with the high expectations are then offended "how dare *you* have *any* expectations of me – I am who I am!, and that is what is wrong with [the other gender] with all their demands)... and I've seen it go both ways with the same kind of complaints.

This third response is so diametrically opposed to these typical responses... Instead, our third response sees the extravagant gift of the work of Christ, and the kind of gifts the magi gave. Neither Christ nor the magi came to see what they could get with the minimalist of efforts, but they came to give themselves, completely, extravagantly. Wise ones see Christ because, like Christ, they did not resist the call to serve, nor were they were so busy with their own life's routines that they were not willing to interrupt them for something that is important.

In 2024, as we think about the worship of the wise, how will we resolve to reduce the areas of our life where we offer resistance or apathy and move more and more to where we recognize God's worth and wisdom and listen for his desires in those areas of our life.

There is a popular post-Christmas hymn called Good King Wenceslas. I'll summarize the hymn's story; because if you are like me, it has been so long -- I haven't heard it for a while. I couldn't remember the lyrics except for that first line, and that is only because I heard it on a sitcom once in a while. Good King Wenceslas... on the feast of Stephen...(which is the day after Christmas, by the way. So the good king looked out the day after Christmas and saw the bright moon shining on a fresh blanket of snow. He saw a poor person gathering winter fuel. He called a page (a personal attendant) to ask about him, who he was. He lived far away against a forest fence, and some other details... The king tells him to bring food and drink and pine logs and we'll go and we'll eat with him. They went out against strong, bitter winds. As night grew darker and the winds got stronger, the page protests that he doesn't know how much farther he can go. The king encourages him to walk in his steps, and the winters rage would "freeze his blood less coldly" He follows in his master's steps and found heat in the sod which were left in the snow prints of the saint. The songwriter concludes with these words: Therefore, Christian men, be sure -- wealth or rank possessing -- you, who now will bless the poor -- shall yourselves find blessing. So that is the song.

What some people may not know is that the song is based on a real life person, wasn't a king, wasn't English (where the carol was written and is still popular). Based on the life of Václav (vot-slof) the Good. Wenceslas is the Latinized version of his name. He was not a king. He is Czechoslovakia's patron saint. A statue of him on a horse remains in Prague's city square (called Wenceslas square). He was not associated with Christmas for them. His day of death and honor, his feast day is Sep 28, and since 2000, it is a national public holiday in that country. All this, even though he lived only 22 years.

Here is his story. His father was a Christian. His mother, though baptized before their marriage, was aligned with the pagans. He was raised primarily by his father's mother, also a Christian. She also became a saint. When Václav turned 13, his father died in battle. His Christian grandmother became regent. But his mother resented her mother-in-law's influence on the government and on Václav who would soon be duke, the leader of the country. So his mother had her mother-in-

law (his grandmother) killed and put herself in power and she sought to oppress Christians. But when Václav did become Duke at 18, he sought to spread Christianity, commissioning the building of several churches. He developed a reputation for being a wise and compassionate ruler, known for his deeds of mercy. Legend says he paid particular attention to caring for the poor, widows, orphans, and prisoners, he opposed slavery, he bought them in order to set them free, and negotiated peace with their traditional enemies, Bavarians. And he was only 22.

His jealous younger brother wanted to become the Duke himself, and backed by their pagan mother, he took advantage of his faith. He invited Václav to a church dedication on Sep 27, 929. The next day as Václav was on his way to prayer, his brother, with henchmen, attacked and killed him.

His tomb soon became a popular site for pilgrimage, and through many shifts of powers, he remained a hero to the Czech people for many years. What makes this especially relevant for today is that he was born into a family, some of whom had very Herod-like qualities – people who were consumed with having, holding, and maintaining power, whose faith was in themselves, and who resorted to violence and knew no peace...

Contrast that with Václav's magi-like devotion to service, whose life and the song he inspired 900 years later reminds us of the incredible lengths he went to help his people, a saintly leader who reminds us that we belong wholly to God and to one another, that we cannot remain comfortable by the fire when our neighbors are cold, hungry and in need. We must go out into the night, into the wintery winds, into the billowing snow for the sake of others."

The simple application is to make a choice between one of three options I've named– (1) an aggressive refusal that seeks to stomp out any faith influences within and around you, (2) to not react at all negative or positive, (3) or to give your life to Jesus. If so, the fact that we haven't, to my knowledge, acted like Herod or Václav's family; and the fact that you are here or tuning in means indifference hasn't dominated your life, that only leaves option 3, and we can all go home happy.

But the better, deeper application will acknowledge that this is not an either-or-or question; nor is it a one-time decision, but a constant process of daily decision making. It is a recognition that at certain times, and/or in certain areas of our lives, any of us may be forced again to choose between these reactions.

Jesus wants to manifest himself, make himself known to us in greater ways; and he wants the world to know him through us. May we always, actively pursue a deeper spiritual journey and discover ways to awaken even more to seeking God's guidance in *every area* of our life, as Helen Steiner Rice wrote: I'll just read small portions.

Poem: Let Us Seek God's Guidance

Today we're facing problems man alone can never solve,
For it takes much more than genius to determine and resolve,
The conditions that confront us all around on every side,
Daily mounting in intensity like the restless, rising tide.

But we'll find new Strength and Wisdom
if instead of proud resistance ...

We humbly call upon the Lord and seek Divine Assistance;
May God turn our vision skyward so that we can see above ...

The gathering clouds of darkness,
and behold God's brightening love.

For the plans of growth and progress
of which we all have dreamed,

Cannot survive materially unless the spirit is redeemed.

So as another Year dawns, let us seek the Lord in prayer
And place our future hopes and plans securely in God's care.

written by Helen Steiner Rice

As we move into 2024, let's resolve to decrease those areas of our life in which we reject Christ's kingship, decrease those times when we do allow the business and distractions of life to ignore Christ's kingship, and to renew our commitment to finding our identity in Christ and to participate in his unlimited and unconditional love in us and for the world. And what better way to resolve than to participate in Communion.

Communion

Invitation [Pastor puts on stole]

Christ invites us to kneel in the darkness of this world, to kneel at his table until we see God's light emerge. Let us wait in this sacrament with hope filled hearts -- as Christ's image grows within us and shows us life. Let him speak to us and teach us love, until we open our hearts to be his home again -- or even for the first time.

portion ad. from Call to Worship by Christine Sine (2012), godspace.wordpress.com

Apostle's Creed

And this is what we, who opened our hearts to him believe. Say with me the Apostle's Creed on the bold font after I ask the questions. Before we do, I want to note that with Epiphany we have just recently concluded the 12 days of Christmas, which, according to the song, is characterized by 12 drummers drumming, remember that? Okay -- which is then thought to represent the 12 beliefs of the Apostle's Creed. So for this time only, I have numbered the 12 points. (Don't read the numbers)

Do you believe in God the Father?

(1) I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

(2) I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (3) who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, (4) suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. (5) On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, (6) and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

(7) I believe in the Holy Spirit, (8) the holy universal church, (9) the communion of saints, (10) the forgiveness of sins, (11) the resurrection of the body, (12) and the life everlasting. Amen.

Confession

Let's prepare our hearts, then for sacrament of Communion, Let's pray...

Creative God, you make all things new in heaven and on earth. We come to you in a new year with new desires and old fears, new decisions and old controversies, new dreams and old weaknesses. Because you are a God of hope, we know that you create all the possibilities of the future. Because you are a God of love, we know that you accept all the mistakes of the past. Lord, we confess that your coming in Christ was not, and is not, widely welcomed.

Wherever there is epiphany there will also be darkness:

- the darkness of old superstitions and dogmas which refuse to fade away;
- the darkness of pride in half-truths that masquerade as wisdom;
- the darkness of entrenched evil that hates the light and tries to dispose of it;
- the darkness of apathy that cannot be bothered to open the shutters;

Most holy and loving God, we admit to you and to each other, that we tend-- either through foolishness or willfulness -- to choose darkness instead of light.

Here and now we surrender to you our fears and proud opinions, our short-sighted folly and our pompous wisdom, our deep seated sins and our apathy towards change and renewal.

Please forgive the darkness and pain we have inflicted on others, and restore the light-starved hopes and ideals within our own souls.

Trusting your grace, we earnestly pray:

**“Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.”
Through Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Epiphany is good news! The Light comes *not* to sear and blind us but to save us. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. In his name I declare to you: Your sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God!

Take up your forgiveness with thanksgiving; and live without shame or anxiety.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ enables us. Amen!

ad. from “Confession and Assurance: Epiphany” by Bruce Prewer, bruceprewer.com;
combined with Maren C Tirabassi’s “A Prayer for the New Year”, USA 20th century alt. in UM BOW)

Music Knowing that we are forgiven, let’s continue to draw our hearts near to God’s Communion table by singing to the tune of Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing -- As We Gather at your Table...

As We Gather at Your Table

(to tune of Come Thou Fount of every Blessing)

Words: Carl P Daw, Jr © 1989 Hope Publishing Co

Music: Wyeth’s Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second, 1813

As we gather at your table, as we listen to your word,
help us know, O God, your presence; let our hearts and minds be stirred.

Nourish us with sacred story till we claim it as our own;
teach us through this holy banquet how to make Love's victory known.

The Great Thanksgiving (Congregations joins on bold font)

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth, from everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God. You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ, in whom you have revealed yourself, our light and our salvation. You sent a star to guide wise men to where the Christ was born; and in your signs and witnesses, in every age and through all the world, you have led your people from far places to his light. In your Spirit, you anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.] Therefore, against long-standing traditions, he went out, sought out, and took his place alongside sinners, which led to his baptism into suffering and death, but by his resurrection the Church was born, and we were delivered from slavery to sin and death, and entered a new covenant.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

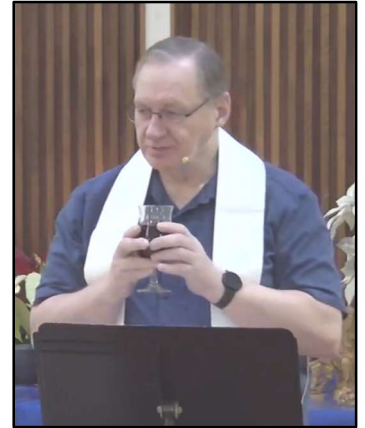
Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and cup, and those at home as well. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,

until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen. And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us sing the Lord's prayer. ♪ **Lord's Prayer**

The Bread and Cup

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."



Communion Blessing

Now through this table's bread and cup, may the Holy Spirit pour God's grace upon us so that we may overflow with your love, transforming our hearts, thereby shaping and forming your world with the joy that you promise. Amen.

loosely adapted from a portion of "Prayer at the Table"
by Rev. Elsa Peters, the United Churches of Olympia, WA. on liturgy.net

Music Let's sing a prayer that as we leave we will be refreshed and faithful to the Gospel. Let's sing Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing

Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing

Words: Attr. to John Fawcett, 1773

Music: The European Magazine and Review; 1792

harm. from The Methodist Hymn and Tune Book, 1889, alt.

1. Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing; fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each, thy love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us, traveling through this wilderness.
2. Thanks we give and adoration for thy gospel's joyful sound.
May the fruits of thy salvation in our hearts and lives abound;
ever faithful, ever faithful to the truth may we be found.

Blessing

Now go in peace. Love and care for one another and others in the name of Christ; and may the Spirit of God fill your hearts, souls and minds; may the power of God strengthen you for each day; and may the love of God be your guiding light and your shining star, both now and forevermore. Amen.

ad. from "Benediction: Epiphany" by Rev. Richard J. Fairchild, spirit-net.ca

CCLI # 2561297