

“The Real Work of Christmas Begins”

We have come to the end of the 12 days of Christmas. Today in worship we celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany which commemorates the visitation of the Magi, the Wise Men. Many of us have already put up our Christmas decorations and the stores were racing to get rid of Christmas in order to prepare for Valentine’s Day. It may be a good thing that we are still focusing on those stories around the birth of Jesus. God’s presence in our world in the tiny flesh of Jesus is the promise that God is with us. Once we encounter the Divine in Jesus, we can never be the same, we are changed and are forever different. May your encounter with Jesus this week fill you with grace and Light. ---
Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“The Real Work of Christmas Begins”**

Prayer for the Week

Gracious God, you have called us to a pilgrimage of faith. The light of your truth summons us, the call of faith is a constant challenge on our journey. We give thanks for the desire to seek you: we give thanks for voices from the past that offer guidance, signposts pointing to the next stage... For the conviction that, unseen but not known, you are with. Keep us faithful to the vision and steadfast on our journey. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen
(Adapted from an ancient Welsh prayer)

Study Guide

Monday, 1/08/17 Matthew 2: 1-12

Yesterday we celebrated Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas which honors the visitation of the Magi. It actually falls on the “sixth”, but some of the older Orthodox Churches celebrate Christmas on January 7. The magi were travelers, foreigners, pagans and they came seeking the “king of the Jews.” This was one of the three most important feast days of the church after Easter and Pentecost. Why? In this celebration, it focuses on the light reaching out to ALL people EVERYWHERE.

Christmas focuses on God’s self-giving gift in Jesus, but Epiphany is about outreach, and grace and evangelism. Evangelism can be a word that is disconcerting, but it just means sharing Good News. The magi were willing to travel maybe up to two years to seek this gift of God in Jesus. *How far are you willing to travel, what kind of time are you willing to give to seek out Jesus? How much are you willing to share with others the good news and grace you have received from this holy child Jesus?*

Tuesday, 1/09/17 Matthew 2: 1-2, Isaiah 60: 1-4

Both of these passages speak of following the “light” or the “star.” A guide is one who usually knows the way. The guide needs to be knowledgeable about the direction, the terrain, the seasons of the year and the group he or she is guiding. Those Magi had no such guide. They had a star and Isaiah says that people will follow the light and come to God. In our life, I would guess we would want a guide, a shepherd who knows us, who understands us, who will lead us in ways that are helpful, good, and joyful and that lead us to the place where we find meaning and hope. In our celebration of Epiphany and Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as our guide. *How do you experience God’s presence and light in your life? List one or two ways you intend to let Christ guide you in this New Year.*

Wednesday, 1/10/17 Isaiah 60:4-6

This joyous occasion is one in which “all” will gather and “you shall see and be radiant: your heart shall thrill and rejoice.” This passage is read for Epiphany because of the mention of gold and frankincense and the camels which is why so many nativity scenes have them. Israel was challenged to be a “light” to the nations. They often fell down and did not point to God by their words, actions or behavior. Like the church over hundreds of years, people still are working on being a place where “all” shall come and see the Light and the love and grace of God. The prophet doesn’t promise perfection or that there is nothing evil or bad, just that there is light and love. *How are you radiant in the midst of life?*

Thursday, 1/11/17 John 1: 1-5

This passage of John is tied into Genesis 1 and is often part of the Epiphany readings. John’s preamble invites the reader to understand the Jesus is not separate from God, but is one with God as well as the reader finds out later, one with humanity. Unpacking this passage is not easy and yet it is certainly a favorite for many. In Christ, people see life and light and no matter how much darkness is around, “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” *In this season of Light, how do you experience that Light in the midst of darkness?*

Friday, 1/12/17 John 1: 14, 16

The first verses of John speak of the “Word” being one with God and being God. These verses remind us that the “Word” is also fully human. It is one of the mysteries of the Christian faith that the believer embraces the understanding that Jesus was “fully God and fully human. God was willing to give up being infinite and all-knowing to become finite and human. From this, John writes, “we have all received grace upon grace.” Even if people do not understand what all this means, the gift is that God was willing to experience life as all human beings do: with joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs, with life and death. *How do you understand the incarnation: Jesus as the Word both human and divine?*