Worship Resources for Sunday, January 6th—Epiphany Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:1-12

Arise, shine, your light has come! The Christmas season is over as we commemorate the revealing of Christ to the world. Originally this was one of the most important feast-days of the Christian year along with Easter, when baptisms would take place, and the Baptism of Jesus was remembered on this day. Then, after Christmas became officially established, the remembering of the visit of the Magi became the focus of this day and the Baptism of Jesus was moved to the following Sunday. At any rate, this day we commemorate the revealing of Christ to the world, by strangers from strange lands to the East, who recognize Jesus as a Messiah, a King.

Our reading from Isaiah recalls the hope of the people returning from exile—this hope is not because of anything they have done, but because of what God has done. The people of Israel’s light has come in God, delivering them from exile, but now the light of God will be among them, and nations will be drawn to their light. In the reading of these six verses, the light switches from being the light that has come, to nations being drawn to their light. So we, now, are the bearers of God’s light. We are called to shine forth the Light of the World, remembering it is not what we have done, but what God has done for us.

Psalm 72 calls for God to give guidance to the king, that the king may rule with justice and God’s wisdom. By ruling with wisdom and justice, the king shall not forget the poor and will act justly to those who are oppressed. The lectionary skips over the parts calling for the king to overcome his enemies, but we should not forget that human beings saw God’s favor, the assurance that God was with them, in earthly things such as the winning and losing of battles, earthquakes, and other destruction. But the understanding that God’s wisdom was present in their rulers was in how the rulers treated the poor and oppressed, values we continue to still uphold in our leaders today.

Matthew 2:1-12 contains the familiar story of the visit of the Magi. The magi seem to know more about this “king of the Jews” than Herod and the priests and scribes. Of course, Herod has jumped to the conclusion this is an earthly king and is threatened by the message the Magi bring. But it also says in verse 3 that all of Jerusalem was also frightened. This was something that was unexpected. And while scholars may question the historicity of this story, we can look past the details and recognize an underlying truth: while we may read back into the Old Testament prophetic passages as referring to a future Christ, others did not, and not all of those passages had necessarily been applied to a quest for a Messiah; we can also understand that through the telling of this story, most did not understand Jesus to be the Messiah, nor did they understand that the Messiah’s kingdom was not of this world. The fear that is personified in Herod is a fear fueled by misinterpretation and misunderstanding. The magi, outsiders, foreigners, are the ones who recognize Jesus first as the Messiah. This paves the way for future generations, perhaps the people who were around the time Matthew’s Gospel was written (some 40-50 years after Jesus’ death) to recognize why the movement that began in Judaism spread throughout the Gentile world. Outsiders, outside of the history, apart from the Hebrew Scriptures, were drawn to this Jesus movement for reasons outside of Scripture and tradition.

Ephesians 3:1-12 speaks of the Mystery that has been revealed for all people, a Mystery that was hidden, a Mystery that was not made known, not even fully through the Scriptures. This is a Mystery that the Gospel, the Good News, is for all people, that Gentiles are also “sharers in the promise.” This Mystery is revealed through revelation—God is revealing, God is pulling back the curtain, to show that God’s love is for all people, that God’s salvation is for all people, that God’s plan is for all people. This Mystery is made known through the faithful. It’s not about practicing certain traditions, understanding certain Scriptures, but rather God’s Mystery is revealed through the gathering of the faithful together, through the acts of faith that the people live out.

On this Epiphany Sunday, we recognize that while our traditions and Scriptures have been formative for us, the true revealing of God’s love for the world comes through our love for one another. “Arise, shine, for your light has come.” And now others are drawn to our light, for we are the bearers of God’s light to the world. Like the magi, we reveal Christ’s love in our faithfulness, and in our devotion to God and the people of God. Through our relationship with others, the Mystery of God is revealed. The truth in Scriptures is revealed through our relationship with others, which is why we read and study the word together as well as individually. We are the body of Christ when we are together.

As we prepare for this New Year, may we commit ourselves more deeply to God by committing ourselves to each other, by being faithful to God’s ways, by remembering how the Magi, outsiders, revealed the love of God to the world. May we seek the outsiders in our lives, may we listen to their voices, and may we recognize that the fullness of God’s love is still being revealed in our world.

Call to Worship

A new day has dawned, a new year begun

 **O Lord, call us so we may hear Your voice**

The world turns to hopes and dreams of the future

 **O Lord, keep us in Your ways and on Your path**

We enter this new year with hope and excitement

 **O Lord, remind us that You lead us**

 **O Lord, guide us as look to You, and worship You. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Light, we confess that we have gone astray and have left Your light. We follow the dim lights of the world of success and fortune. We follow the dim lights that call us to be more religious by following rules. We follow the fading light of personal salvation. Forgive us for not seeking the true Light, of Your love for all the world. Forgive us for not following the ways of Jesus, who commanded us to love one another. Call us to be light-bearers of love, compassion and justice, in which the Mystery of Your Love is revealed. In the name of Jesus the Messiah, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The Mystery is being revealed—God’s love is for all people, God’s purpose is for all people. There is nothing you can do that will separate you from God’s love. Rather, God has called us to love one another and to forgive. Seek forgiveness, and you will know you are forgiven. Seek to love others, and you will know God’s love. This is the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, who made the earth and stars, shine down on us. Guide us in our lives in Your ways of justice, love and mercy. Turn us away from the temptation to be religious people that follow rules, into faithful people who follow Jesus, who love one another, show compassion for one another, who lift up the poor and stand up for the oppressed, who cry out for justice. Call us to be active in this world as people of faith, people who follow Jesus. Call us into this life more fully. In the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.