

Offering

Second theme song: SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Benediction

Leader: Let us proclaim the mystery!

People: **Christ is born**

All: *that the house of the Lord may be filled!*

Postlude

O, the mystery of God's dwelling

January 5, 2014

Epiphany . . . in diversity!



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

Focus Statement

In God's mysterious ways, outsiders become insiders, strangers become brothers and sisters, and enemies become friends. So let us welcome all who come to the dawning from on high, that the house of the Lord may be established—*there is light!*

Song Suggestions

Theme songs

HWB 233 *Joyful Is the Dark*

SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Hymnal and supplements music

HWB 111 *O Praise the Gracious Power*

HWB 212 *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

HWB 322 *For We Are Strangers No More*

HWB 646 *O Splendor of God's Glory Bright*

SJ 16 *Praise with Joy the World's Creator*

SJ 23 *Slowly Turning, Ever Turning*

INVITING THE MYSTERY

Prelude

Silence

Prayer of invocation

Call to worship

Leader: Come as fellow heirs of the living God!
People: **Let us awake to the marvel that in Christ we are one.**
Leader: Oh, the mystery of God's dwelling in our diversity!
People: **Our hearts thrill and rejoice**
ALL: *as we open wide the house of the Lord!*

First theme song: HWB 233 *Joyful Is the Dark*

ENGAGING THE MYSTERY

Dramatic reading: (see www.leaderonline.org)

Isaiah 60:1-6

Confession and enjoying the light of the Advent wreath

Leader: Lift up your eyes and look. There is no partiality in Christ.
How might we
let all people in on this mystery?
(pause)
Let us confess our unwillingness to share Christ with those
of other nations, tribes, races, families, social classes, and denominations.
(pause)
The Advent wreath reminds us that our light has come.

People: **In this light, we celebrate forgiveness:
the glory of the Lord has risen upon us!**

Children's time

Discuss what "diversity" means. Say, "In the book of Isaiah, we read these words: 'Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. . . . Nations [meaning many different people] shall come to your light. . . . Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together'" (vv. 1, 3, 4).

Ask how many of the children have a fireplace in their home. What kinds of things do they do around the fireplace? We often think of a fireplace as a place to relax on a cold winter night—and its warmth and light will make it a gathering place for everyone in the house! So let's let this fireplace help us remember Isaiah's words about God's light that makes everyone want to come close. (Show children a fireplace and place it in the dollhouse.)

Invite children to close their eyes and imagine their way through the following questions, keeping their answers to themselves:

- *If all people are made in God's image, I wonder what God looks like.*
- *I wonder why God created so many different kinds of people.*
- *I wonder what I can learn about God by getting to know someone different from me.*
- *I wonder how knowing that God loves each one of us might help us get along.*

Invite the children to open their eyes and say these words: "Isaiah's words describe God's hope for our world, made possible by the birth of Jesus: that strangers and enemies will become friends. As we sing our song one more time, let's remember that the promises it talks about are promises for *all* people."

Close by singing *HWB* 585 "In Your Sickness."

Scripture reading

Silence

Sharing

Hymn

CELEBRATING THE MYSTERY

Sermon starter

Today's Gospel reading "jumps ahead" by focusing on the Magi, whose visit is traditionally associated with Epiphany in the Western church and technically celebrated on January 6. The Magi, representative of all the nations of the earth, come to give homage and gifts to the Christ child. Returning to the theme of the universal mission of God's people from the first Sunday of Advent, today's readings highlight the assembling of all the nations before God and the abundance they bring with them. In Isaiah 60, the exiles are promised not only their own return but an ingathering of all of those who will come to their ("your") light. The psalm, repeated from the second Sunday of Advent but ending this time with verses 10-14, not only highlights the king's care for the most vulnerable but also notes the generous gifts brought by the nations. And in Ephesians 3, Paul speaks of his mission to the Gentiles (nations) and of their inclusion in the body of Christ.

Occurring during the peak days of annual darkness in the northern hemisphere, it is natural that Epiphany features the brilliance of light. Like Easter, Epiphany is a "bright" holy day in the Christian year when sanctuaries become beacons of light to the world. In the midst of the darkness that envelops this world, we bask in the light that has come in Christ (Isaiah 60). In the darkness of night, even the Gentiles find their way to the stable by the light of the star (Matthew 2). The light of Epiphany (which means "manifestation" or "appearance") reveals to Paul "the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:3).

Still, despite the light of Epiphany, the gospel of Christ remains mysterious—a mystery that can only tentatively be described, as Paul seeks to do in his letter to the believers at Ephesus. What is clear is that the gospel has universal dimensions and cosmic implications. Gentiles, former outsiders, become "fellow heirs, members of the same body, sharers in the promise" (v. 6). Even more, God's wisdom revealed in the gospel is to be made known "to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (v. 10), those very powers that until now have succeeded in bringing creation (including humans) under their dominion. What is this wisdom? It is that nonviolent suffering love—the love of Jesus on the cross—will reconcile, redeem, and restore all things "in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

Response action: communion

Leader: The peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: We gather at this table recognizing that Jesus did not come for *a* people, but for *all* people. We gather as one body in the mystery of God's dwelling among us in the sharing of one loaf and one cup—signs of the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He was born in the poverty of a stable and adored both by affluent magi bearing gifts and lowly shepherds who first proclaimed him. It is this one—Emmanuel—who now invites us to come and dine, to be filled with all the fullness of God, and to proclaim his kingdom so the house of the Lord may be established forever and forever.

Holy child, living God, we come in all of our rich diversity:
 young and old,
 rich and poor,
 men and women of varying ethnicity and heritage,
so we might taste and see that you are good.
We gather so the mystery of this table—
 the mystery of your dwelling—

may be profoundly known,
if not fully understood.
Through the fellowship of your table,
draw us into the sustaining light of your grace.
Arise over us
so our hearts might resound with joy
and so we might be set free from the bondage
of prejudice, hate, resentment, pride,
and any other thing that separates us from you
and from one another.
Allow this table to truly be for us a communion—
a breaking down of barriers and a building up of your body.
We pray with boldness and confidence the prayer that Jesus taught us:

All: *Our Father . . .*

Leader: *(picking up the bread)* On the night in which the light of the world gave himself for us, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: “Take, eat this, all of you. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
(breaking the bread) The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ—one body, broken for all, that we in all our diversity might be his body in the world.
(picking up the cup) After the supper had ended, Jesus took the cup, blessed it, gave it to his disciples and said: “Take, drink from this, all of you. This is the 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.” This cup is a sharing in the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all unrighteousness and allows us to know the joy of relationship both with God and with one another . . .
(continuing to hold the cup and picking up the bread) so we can proclaim the mystery of God’s dwelling in Christ: that Christ has died, that Christ is risen, and that Christ will come again.
(the communion elements are shared)

Leader: Let us pray.
Precious Jesus, you who were broken for us,
we praise you for the holy mystery of this bread and cup,
symbols of your body and blood.
Strengthen us not as an assortment of individuals,
but as the beautiful diversity of your church,
to go forth bearing the gifts of your love even for our enemies,
of your joy even in the midst of suffering,
and of your peace even in the midst of violence
so all might see and know that you are Lord. Amen.

Offering

Second theme song: SS 10 Come! Walk in the Light

Benediction

Leader: The mystery has been made known!
People: **The good news of Jesus Christ is for all.**
All: *There is light!*

Postlude