**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer, Jan. 2, 2022**

 **The Epiphany**

… upon you Yahweh shines,
and over you appears divine glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and rulers by your shining radiance.
*(Isaiah 60:2)*



**HELLOs and then Betty mutes everyone.                        (Betty or Suzie)**

**WELCOME               (Suzie or Betty)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to **Alicia and George Urban** for preparing today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer and song today: Sr. Grace Hartzog, Linda Donaldson, Paula Lake, Judith Galleazzi, Mary Ott, Gail DeGeorge, Bill Fanelli, Anne Regan, Rose Marie Smith.
* After prayer this Sunday, you are welcome to continue last week’s conversation about how to be present to people who are experiencing homelessness.  Many of you know Nancy Sushinsky as a regular on Sundays. She’s also a longtime shelter director and public policy advocate on this issue. We asked and Nancy gladly agreed to offer a brief intro and then answer questions for about half an hour. [More on Nancy at end of file.]
* To help us stay attentive to each other, let’s refrain from Zoom chat until after our closing song, except for Pat and Greg Campbell’s kind posting of our reflection questions.

**SETTLING IN**  **(Sr. Grace Hartzog)**

Take some time to be still and relax. … Be aware of your breathing. … Be aware of the depth of God’s love deep within your being. …Take breaths again to celebrate our being in God and with each other. ... Finally, breathe together and reflect on God’s gift that calls us to be here this morning.

Linda Donaldson will now lead us in singing “Christ, Be Our Light.”

**OPENING SONG:** “Christ Be Our Light”     (Linda Donaldson)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness

Longing for truth, we turn to You.

Make us Your own, Your holy people

Light for the world to see.

 Refrain: Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in Your church gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has pow'r to save us.

Make us your living voice. Refrain

Longing for food, many are hungry

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us Your bread, broken for others

Shared until all are fed. Refrain

Longing for shelter, many are homeless

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us Your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone. Refrain

**CALL TO WORSHIP       (Paula Lake)**

Today we find joy in continuing the Christmas season.  Our service calls us into prayer and reflection as we travel toward the “Star of David.”

**GATHERING PRAYER (Paula Lake)**

We gather here to celebrate the fact that God is in love with us.  That LOVE begets the Son, whose birth we join in the wonder of the heavenly light.  Our focus is the light Isaiah seeks and that calls us, as well as the Maji, who travel far to find it and its meaning.  Let us begin seeking.

**INTRODUCTION OF THE THEME (Alicia)**

Adapted from Sister Janice McLaughlin in Catholic Women Preach.

The first reading today is from Isaiah who speaks of “darkness covering the earth”.  The next part of the reading offers hope. He tells us: “The Lord’s light shines on them, and other nations shall walk by their light.” Each one of us is meant to be a bearer of that light. We are called to shine a light in the darkness, to bring hope and healing to our fractured, divided, violent world.

The Gospel tells us of wise people, who followed a star that led them to the Christ Child in Bethlehem.  We don’t know much about them. We are told that they came from the East and brought gifts.  Gold is representative of Jesus’ kingship. Frankincense is a symbol of the divinity of Jesus because priests burned the substance in the Temple. Myrrh was used to prepare the dead for burial and is offered in anticipation of Jesus’ death.

Still, we don’t know where these wise people came from or even how many there were.  We don’t know how far they traveled and what dangers they faced on the way. We can imagine the courage it took to leave their homes and travel to an unknown destination with only a star to guide them. And we can imagine the radical change that this journey brought into their lives. We also might be able to picture how their lives were changed when they returned home and told others of their experience. They were real seekers who followed the star to Bethlehem.

The next part of today’s reading is more ominous.  The magi are warned in a dream to return by another route.  We are told that Herod, the ruler appointed by the Romans, “will seek the young Child to destroy him.” Herod, like so many rulers in the world then and now, feared losing his wealth and power. Warned by an angel in a dream, Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus escape death by fleeing into Egypt. Like thousands of people on the move today, they became refugees in a foreign land.

*[Pause.]* Now Judith Galleazzi will read from Isaiah.

**READING 1** [**Is 60:1-6**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/60?1)  **(Judith Galleazzi)**

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem!  Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you Yahweh shines,
and over you appears divine glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and rulers by your shining radiance.
Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you:
your children come from afar,
and your sons and daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,
your heart shall throb and overflow,
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,
the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.
Caravans of camels shall fill you,
dromedaries from Midian and Ephah;
all from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense,
and proclaiming the praises of God.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Mary Ott)**

Imagine Isaiah saying to you:  Rise up in splendor!  Your light has come, the glory of Yahweh shines upon you. How do you react?

Of all the things promised in this reading, what resonates with you as important today?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:** Share slide 1, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.)

**Betty:**  Now George Urban will read from the Gospel of Matthew.

**READING 2** [**Mt 2:1-12**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/2?1) **(George)**

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of King Herod,
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
“Where is the newborn leader of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage.”

When King Herod heard this,
he was greatly troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people,
He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea,
for thus it has been written through the prophet:
*And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
since from you shall come a ruler,
who is to shepherd my people Israel.*”

Then Herod called the magi secretly
and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance.
He sent them to Bethlehem and said,
“Go and search diligently for the child.
When you have found him, bring me word,
that I too may go and do him homage.”

After their audience with the king they set out.
And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
and on entering the house
they saw the child with Mary, his mother.
They prostrated themselves and did him homage.
Then they opened their treasures
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they departed for their country by another way.

*[Pause.]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS: (Mary Ott)**

Picture yourself in the stable: When you see the babe in the manger, what stirs within you?

Staying in the stable, how do you react when you see the “wise men” approaching on their camels and then offering gifts?

What gift would you want to offer the baby? How would you present it?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:** Share slide 2, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.)

**MEDITATIVE SONG**  **(Mary Ott)**

We’ve been with Mary in the stable.  Ponder what she -- **and you** -- came to know about this child.

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:** Share slide 3, fade 1:40-1:53, stop slide.)

Betty: Now Karen McCarthy will lead us in our sharing

**SHARING  (Karen McCarthy)**

We invite you to **briefly** share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings.  That helps us to glimpse the many ways God is among us.  We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.  And let’s leave a bridge of silence between speakers.

We begin in silence as we gather our reflections.  *[Long pause.]*

Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute again afterwards.

Who would like to begin?

(Sharing)

Ask when closer to the time limit, “Would anyone else like to share.”

(Let sharing continue for about 20 minutes.)

Thank you for your insights and thoughts.  We have to stop now, and we can continue after the final song, as we often do.  Now let us pray together, with Gail DeGeorge.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY     (Gail DeGeorge)**

Our response will be: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For all who celebrate the Epiphany here and around the world, let us pray: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For all vowed religious women and men, and all lay people that they stay far from danger and are able to grow in their spiritual life, let us pray: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For all who suffer from illness, especially those who have contracted the Covid virus. Let us pray: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For every person as we enter the challenge of the New Year. Let us pray: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For those who are homeless, without jobs and facing homelessness, or having inadequate food for themselves and their children, let us pray: Star of David, hear our prayer.

For what else shall we pray?: (Please unmute and then mute yourself after your intention.)

(Prayers) Star of David, hear our prayer.

Thank you.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Bill Fanelli)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us.  *[Pause.]*

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. *[Pause.]*

Holy One, make us your bread of abundance.  Make us your wine of joy.

Let even our fragments be plenty to share.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER, OUR MOTHER      (Anne Regan)            ALL MUTED**

Now let us join our hearts with all who seek the coming of God, using the words that Jesus gave us written by the Polynesian and Māori people and the New Zealand Anglican community:

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world;
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trial too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Rose Marie Smith)**

Bless those

who know the darkness

And do not fear it,

who carry the light

and are not consumed

who prepare the way

and will not abandon it,

who bless with grace

that does not leave. Amen.

(Brief pause) Now let’s sing We Three Kings with Linda.

**CLOSING SONG: We Three Kings…. (Linda Donaldson)**

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 night,

Star with royal beauty bright.
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a King on Bethlehem’s plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign. Refrain

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh,
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God most high. Refrain

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume

Breathes a life of gathering gloom,
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone cold tomb. Refrain

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

**RESOURCES**

Image at top and on second reflection slide: [Advent Reflection – The Fourth Joy of Mary](https://catholicwomenspeak.com/advent-reflection-the-fourth-joy-of-mary/)

USCBC: readings for Jan. 2, 2022, The Epiphany

Adaptation from Catholic Women Preach – The Epiphany of the Lord: January 2018, by Medical Mission Sister Janice McLaughlin -- <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/01072018>

Jan L. Richardson, “In Wisdom’s Path, Discovering the Sacred in Every Season,” Wanton Gospeller Press, Orlando, Florida

Aurora borealis video after Isaiah: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h1OCugafJ8

Meditative Song: “Mary, Did You Know?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1H1-scfD1s>

**FYI – about our conversation after prayer about people who are experiencing homelessness:**  We know Nancy Sushinsky from our Sunday prayer. Nancy is also a longtime advocate for individuals experiencing homelessness.  She first volunteered at a soup kitchen and then at Rainbow – a hypothermia shelter in Rockville.  Nancy served on their Board and later became their Executive Director, a position she held until her retirement. Nancy continues to work with housing programs with Community Reach.