**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**January 8, 2023 Feast of the Epiphany**

“A star is not a light that’s going out, it’s a light that’s bursting: Everything we do now is seeding life for the future” Sr. Anne Munley, SSIHM ( lcwr )

Please bring

***Bread and Wine or another beverage to share at communion***

**HELLOs,** then Zoom host mutes everyone.

**WELCOME ( Bill Cavanaugh )**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions — Is there anyone here for the first time? (Welcome!….please unmute and introduce yourself….Thank you!)
* Kathy and I, with much appreciated help from Suzie and Betty, have prepared this morning’s prayer. We want to thank all who answered the call to read this morning: Suzie De Quattro, Karen and Dan McCarthy, Richard McGinnis, Peggy Thompson, Mary Dolmage, Cecilia Estrada, Sr. Jo’Ann De Quattro, and Sr. Jennie Lechtenberg.
* We are always looking for new readers and grateful for all readers. Contact Norb Bufka if you would like to read on Jan. 15 and Cecilia and Mary for Jan. 22. Their emails can be found in Chat.

**SETTLING IN ( Bill Cavanaugh )**

Let your breath bring you into quiet so you can be attentive to the Spirit and to each other. Notice your breath as it goes in and out…..Let it slow and deepen….and slowly fill you with the Peace of Christ… We begin with 3 deep breaths. One to be here…one to be together…and one to know the Spirit who never leaves us.

Now let us relax in peace with our opening song followed by **Suzie De Quattro** leading us in a Gathering Prayer.

**OPENING SONG : O Holy Night by Josh Groban** <https://youtu.be/17kiIIxSdC0>

(Play at 1.25 speed.)

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining.
It is the night of our dear Savior’s birth.
Long lay the world. in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks
A new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees!
O hear the angel voices!
O night divine,
O night when Christ was born,

O night divine,
O night when Christ was born.

Chains shall He shall break
For the slave is our brother
And in His Name
All oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy
In grateful chorus raise we.
Let all within us praise His holy Name.

Christ is the Lord!
Let ever ever praise Thee!

Noel, Noel,

O night, o night divine!
Noel, Noel,

O night, o night divine!
Noel, Noel,

O night, o night divine!

**CALL TO WORSHIP / GATHERING PRAYER ( Suzie De Quattro)**

Creator of all creation, Lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer this ‘gathering in’ that will be more than enough, because in reality everything and everyone is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do.

We look to You as our guiding Star leading us each day to stand for love, for healing, for justice and good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation. We know that this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed that ‘all may be one’.

May what is hidden in our hearts be illuminated with Your wisdom about how to move forward to offer our gifts in the coming days, to live incarnated with gratitude, blessed with amazing Grace. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God; we offer our pray together with Christ our Lord, Amen

**Bill**  : Now **Kathy** will introduce us to today’s theme

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME :** **( Kathy Cavanaugh )**

###### Today is the Feast of the Epiphany which is celebrated in various traditional ways. In the Eastern Orthodox community, Christmas is celebrated on this day. Some traditions celebrate by making King’s cake or bread, giving presents, or participating in house blessings or Baptisms to mark this occasion. Some place the “three Kings” into Nativity scenes today; or consider it a time of closure to the 12 days of Christmas.

###### Though it falls in the afterglow of Christmas, the feast of Epiphany, we discovered, is a key celebration in our liturgy and faith journey because we recognize the profound revelation of God Incarnate in All. Yes, the Epiphany tells the story of Good News: God is not only with us: the Spirit of God’s loving Presence is in each of us! It tells how a community of seekers, located far away, follow a call and then are humble enough to see and accept the unexpected.

###### As we reflected on the Epiphany story, the theme that caught our attention was the awareness of Divine revelation in all human beings, creatures and creation; and our responses to seeing God revealed. It seemed likely that there was some longing, curiosity, or inner stirring in the Magi who saw this unusual star in the night sky. This same inner stirring happens to us in our faith journey process.

###### Some describe this inner longing as ‘Holy Disquiet’ - that is, a time when things don’t seem quite right, and we sense God may be calling us in a new direction. Healthy disquiet may be a sacred time because we are led, despite the discomfort of change, not to discouragement, but to reliance on God’s grace. Divine revelation may come to us in our longings, dreams, nature, and prayer. Might this Epiphany celebration be the holy disquiet of God longing to do a new thing in you? May we behold the ‘Aha of the Divine’ all around us and in us!

**Bill** : Now **Dan McCarthy** will read from the 2nd chapter of Matthew, then **Karen** **McCarthy** will offer questions that will lead us into a period of silent reflection. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1 : Matthew 2 : 1 - 12**  **( Dan McCarthy )**

After Jesus’ birth - which happened in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod - astrologers from the East arrived in Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage.”

At this news Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

“ In Bethlehem of Judea,” they informed him. “ Here is what the prophet has written:

 ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea,

 are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,

 since from you will come a ruler

 who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

Herod called the astrologers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star’s appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, “Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, report back to me - so that I may go and offer homage , too.”

After their audience with the ruler, they set out. The star which they observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and paid homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 1** *[Pause after each question.* **( Karen McCarthy )**

**When have you experienced finding God in an unexpected place?**

**Notice Herod’s response of fear and skepticism while the Magi’s focus was on finding and acting on the truth. When have you experienced both responses in your faith journey?**

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** (**Show slide**, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**Bill :**  Now **Peggy Thompson** will read a reflection on the “Epiphany” adapted from Sr. Mary McGlone.

**READING 2 : Epiphany ( Peggy Thompson)**

The Greek word for epiphany is apocalypse, a revelation; it is an enlightening or astonishing disclosure! Epiphany is about movement, connection, awareness and awe. Participating in an epiphany experience may require an uncomfortable process of venturing into unknown places that stretch us to question our assumptions. The journey can be so challenging that we have to let go of extra baggage in order to rely more on God.

In reality, all of us can be reluctant to saddle up our camels and follow some distant star. It sounds too risky – especially if we focus on the journey rather than keeping centered on ‘God in and with us’. This is when we look to the Magi as patron saints of evolution, reminders that no matter how much we accomplish, learn or love, God keeps offering more to those willing to see.

Pope Francis reminds us on the feast of Epiphany: “The Magi teach us that we need to set out anew each day, in life as in faith, for faith is a fascinating journey, a constant and restless movement, ever in search of a deeper relationship with God.”

Franciscan Father Richard Rohr tells about the epiphany St. Francis of Assisi had. “After partying one night, he left the party and looked up at the stars above Assisi,” writes Rohr. “He stood there for a long, long time. He was truly in awe of what he saw. He said, ‘If this is creation, what must the Creator be like?’”

God leads us into the fullness of Reality; not away from dilemmas and paradoxes, but right into the horns of human dilemma. Just as the Magi discovered the unexpected with great reverence and offered their gifts, may we too discover the reflection of the Divine image in all creation. May we too attend with great reverence and surrender to the unknown Holy Mystery. It always leads to another Epiphany.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 2 :** *[Pause after each question.]* **( Karen McCarthy )**

**Have you ever had a moment of awe looking up at the sky? What was it like?**

**How has a dream inspired you to change direction?**

**What next step in your faith journey are you encouraged to take?**

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** (**Show** slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**Bill :**  Now **Richard McGinnis** will read a reflection on  **“ All Are Welcome”** adapted from the writings of Bishop Untener, Sr. Barbara Reid and Sr. Mary McGlone.

**READING 3 : (Richard McGinnis)**

Today’s Gospel of the Epiphany is likely more legend than history. However, when we let the Magi camp out in our imagination, they may appear as meaningful as they did centuries ago. They followed their star, seeing it as a natural gift from God, symbolizing the Love that draws creation toward universal communion. The story’s long-standing message supports the courage and faith of the main characters. Something we call **‘grace**’ seems to have enticed these ‘seekers’, calling them to believe that nature itself was communicating a message of earth-shakingimportance.

This desert crossing caravan of religious pilgrims from the East, risked their lives to travel far seeking the ‘newborn ruler of the Jews’. What an unexpected outcome—they find a baby in an unlikely place - a manger in a lowly stable – and they are humble enough to accept the unexpected. The Magi, now transformed with wisdom, chose to ignore the powerful King Herod’s request to report the location of the child. Instead, they listen to the stirring of the voice of God in their dream and change their plans taking a different road home.

Their discernment and actions can serve as a role model for our participation in God’s vision to be co-creators in welcoming the kindom of God. As ‘foreigners’ the Magi also foreshadow the way the future Gentiles will flock to the early Christian communities.

Today’s other readings underscore the welcome extended to all in God’s embrace. The prophet Isaiah speaks of how people of every nation will stream toward the new Jerusalem. St Paul tells the Ephesians that all are equal members, including Gentiles.

His insistence on this revelation by the Spirit reveals the struggles of the early Christian community to make inclusion a reality. The difficulties in welcoming diversity still challenge us today.

Matthew’s feast of the Epiphany invites us to awaken to the inclusive way that Jesus invites and welcomes. Welcoming not just one kind of community, but Everyone:

Everyone without exception.

That means that I can look at anyone and say:

“Jesus came for this person! And Jesus would have come if this were the only person in the world. Jesus loves this person. This person is Me too!”

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 3** *[Pause after each question.]* **( Karen McCarthy )**

**What does it feel like to be welcomed when away from home?**

**When have you taken a risk to make sure ‘All Are Welcome’?**

**How is ‘holy disquiet’ at work in you?**

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** (**Show** slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**Bill :** Now **Mary Dolmage** will lead us in sharing our personal reflections.

**SHARING: ( Mary Dolmage )**

We invite you to share briefly what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. *[Long-ish pause]*

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

[If there is silence more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  *[Pause for a slow, deep breath.]*

*[Stop by about 20 minutes after the hour.]*

Thank you.  We have to stop now, and we can continue after the final song, as we often do.

**Bill :** Now **Cecilia Estrada**  will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY ( Cecilia Estrada )**

Let’s pause in silence to notice what prayer rises in us now. *[Pause….]*

Our response today will be: “**God who is within us , hear our prayer.”**

* We ask for our hearts to be filled with trust and openness to Your Divine Indwelling and Mystery alive in our ongoing conversion: **God who is within us, hear our prayer.**
* We ask for Your gifts of guidance and wisdom, O Holy One, for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and all committed brothers and sisters. And for all who continue to serve humbly, steadfastly and unconditionally those in need throughout the world: **God who is within us, hear our prayer.**
* We ask for Your gifts of justice, mercy, and shelter, O Holy One, for those who are persecuted or excluded for any reason; for those who are demeaned or considered as inferior; for all who are homeless, especially for persons camped at our borders seeking asylum and those devastated by war: **God who is within us, hear our prayer.**
* We ask for Your grace, O Holy One, for our continued commitment to doing our part for living with less plastic, taking only what we need, caring for and protecting all creation and creatures in the World: **God who is within us, hear our prayer.**
* We ask for Your gifts of wisdom, justice, courage and endurance for all those participating in the “Continental Phase” of the ongoing Synod process.  O Holy One, guide them so that our church tent may be expanded and become welcoming to all: **God Who is within us, hear our prayer.**

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Shared prayers)

Response: **“God who is within us, hear our prayer!”**

O You who love us more than we can imagine, we are grateful for this chance to give you our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION  : ( Sr. Jo’Ann DeQuattro )**

On this Feast of Epiphany, we are reminded of Christ Incarnate in all Creation.

 Ordinary matter is the hiding place for Spirit and thus the very Body of God.

And so we pray:

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 **Earth** and the work of human hands, and blessed them,

and shared them with the people who shared his life.

We, too, share Jesus’ life, and in a special way in this community.

So let us lift our bread and cup and extend our hands to one another,

in celebration of our communion in the One who is born in us.

Let us break bread with anyone in the room with us

and truly with one another, nourishing each other

to birth the emerging Emmanuel.

[All eat and drink.]

Holy One, you chose to be fully part of humanity.

We now choose to let you be fully part of us.

May we bring your good news into the lives and communities around us. Amen.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS : ( Sr. Jennie Lechtenberg )**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

**All (muted):** Our Father, Our Mother, you are here among us.

Blessed be Your Creation.

May Your reign be a reality here on earth.

May we become more interested in building Your kin-dom here and now

rather than waiting for it to come down from above.

Let us share our bread with those who hunger.

Let us learn to forgive as well as to receive forgiveness.

Help us through the time of temptation, delivering us from all evil.

For ours are the eternal blessings that you pour upon the earth.

Amen

**FINAL BLESSING : ( Kathy Cavanaugh )**

Let us open our hearts as we offer and savor a Christmas and Epiphany Blessing here and beyond as we say together this Prayer by Howard Thurman:

When the songs of the angels are stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back in their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring Peace to All,

To trust God’s grace is with us,

To make music in the heart.

Amen

**Please join in singing Amazing Grace with Judy Collins and the Global Virtual Choir:**

**CLOSING SONG: Amazing Grace** <https://youtu.be/Oav8CkGpcwA> (play at 1.25 speed and end at 4:00)

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I’m found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I’m found,
Was blind, but now I see.

**RESOURCES:**

Sr Mary McGlone: <https://www.ncronline.org> ; Dec.5, 2020, “Call to Dream Big”; Jan. 8, 2023 “The Epiphany of the Lord”; Pat Marin, Nov. 4, 2022, Pencil Preaching, “Epiphany”.

Sr. Barbara Reid; “All Are Welcome”; January 2023, “Give Us This Day”, ‘Within the Word’; January 8-14

Bishop Ken Untener: The Little Blue Book, Advent and Christmas Seasons, Jan. 8, 2022-2023, “The Magi” and “King Cake”.

Pope Francis: http:/[ww.popefrancishomilies.com](http://ww.popefrancishomilies.com) ; Jan 6, 2022, “the Magi Travel Toward Bethlehem”.

Epiphany Sunday Gospel Readings: Mathew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a,5-6; from The Inclusive Bible: The First egalitarian Translation; 2007, by Priests for Equality; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Prayer of Jesus; <https://www.minnesotaumc.org>

“Christmas Prayer” by Howard Thurman