

The Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew



OUR LITURGY UNFOLDED: CHRISTMAS and EPIPHANY 2022-2023

The many aspects of the Christmas tradition...

In the introduction to the article “Seasons of Celebration” (*Liturgical Spirituality*) we are reminded that the “celebration of Christmas developed in relation to both pagan and Jewish religious practice, sometimes intentionally asserting Christian meanings directly in the face of surrounding (Jewish/pagan) understandings of the time. Jesus’ “birthday” may have come to be celebrated on December 25 in direct conflict with the winter solstice observed by pagans. .. Nobody knows Jesus’ actual birthday...but that is not the point, for December 25 is clearly a construction of meaning intended to convey truth about Jesus to others in the cultures that “hosted” the early Christians.” (Pp 153-5).

Let us continued to be reminded of the themes of Christmas. According to Richard Giles in *Times and Seasons* “Christmas in liturgical terms is a dual celebration, of both the birth of Jesus, reputedly at Bethlehem (though just as probably at Nazareth), and of the incarnation of the cosmic Christ, a mystery that can be approached only by poetic metaphor. Whichever theme is uppermost, the feast calls for *liturgical partying* of the first order. Vestments are white and the liturgical space is decorated to the nines with every conceivable trimming”.

The dual characteristic of the feast is reflected in the very different worship of the first mass of Christmas, celebrated the evening before, compared with that of Christmas morning. The eve of Christmas, tends to be a nostalgic candle-lit affair in which the blessing of the crib (crèche) containing figures of Mary and Joseph with the Christ Child plays a key part. On Christmas morning, however, the mood is quite different. The emphasis shifts to a theological meditation on the eternal significance of the birth of Christ. “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined*”. (Isaiah 9:2)



The Season of Epiphany January 6, 2023

“Epiphany” meaning “showing forth,” commemorates the first showing of Christ to the world, when His presence was revealed to the three Magi. It is, in some sense, a continuation of the Christmas season. In the season of Epiphany we also remember the revelation of Christ to John the Baptist, to the disciples, and to all Christians; and Christ’s baptism and our own, together with the ways in which Christ was revealed to humankind, especially in the healing miracles. The Season of Epiphany

begins with the arrival of the sages from afar to visit and pay homage to the infant Jesus in Bethlehem — the event through which God makes known that Jesus is the Light for the world, not just for a chosen few. We are reminded that while Jesus was a Jew and spoke largely to Jewish crowds during his life on Earth, He also spoke to non-Jews. Throughout the Season we celebrate the Light that Jesus has brought into the world. We strive to be more mindful of the world around us, and to realize our call to carry the Light of Christ and to make it known — in our homes, in our places of work and leisure, in our towns and counties, and beyond. The liturgical color of green is used on vestments, representing the green things of God's earth and referring to growth of the spirit of God within us in response to His coming at Christmas.

The Gospel readings during the Season of Epiphany

The final reading in the Liturgy of the Word is from one of the four Gospels, through which we hear the words and actions of Jesus Christ. In Year A we read mostly from the book of Matthew. You will notice that the wise men do not appear in the Creche until Epiphany.

The Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ

January 6, 2023

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, *In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.*

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.