



FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Cycle B

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

GATHERING

(An unlit candle made in the shape of a star rests on a gold cloth-covered table. Pictures of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds around the world surround the candle.)

We reflect this week on God's inclusiveness. Last week we reflected on family as holy, even when not perfect. How have you acted this past week with the good of the family in mind? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to a period of silence before he/she lights the candle. After some time of quiet, the leader prays as follows on behalf of all.)

Leader: Wake up, Arise, Shine forth!
Embrace God's justice
So others can behold and walk in God's light.

Wake up, Arise, Shine forth!
Embrace God's Justice
So others can live in the peace and
well-being God wills for them.

Wake up, Arise, Shine forth!
Embrace God's justice
so that the poor and defenseless can
have a share in the prosperity of God's people.

(Members join in singing, "Where the Promise Shines." The song may be found on the Internet.)

Focus Question

Life is full of surprises. Name a surprising thing about your life.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

The experience of being in a dense forest offers many surprises in each passing season. For example, when walking in springtime in the Paseydin Wilderness, a national forest located in the Pacific Northwest, one can encounter wild flower gardens that can take one's breath away. Without warning there can suddenly appear on a nearby hillside, a sea of avalanche lilies. This lovely little lily covers entire hillsides with a waving mass of white flowers growing so closely together that no sign of green shows through. Surely the flower merits its name as the scene resembles a shifting avalanche of snow. As the sun breaks through onto this garden, it creates a scene that could convert even the least believing among us. For those with eyes to see, here is revealed something of the mystery that is God.

The mystery that is God has been in the process of being revealed over the centuries. God becomes manifest, becomes more fully known, slowly through the experiences and the events of history. While they wavered at times, from their beginnings the Jewish people experienced, believed in and revered one God, the God of Israel. As time moved on, many Jews were surprised to wake up to the fact that God was much bigger than they understood; that God's plan of salvation was much wider. Step by step, they came to understand that God's plan, "not made known to people in other generations...has now been revealed...Gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promises in Christ Jesus."

Today, we can be sure of this much about the mystery that is God: our God is a big God. Our God can surprise us in the lilies on a mountainside and in a plan for salvation that sees all people *included*. God's boundaries are not our boundaries. Our God includes everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, people of all races and religions.

As we begin a new year, we acknowledge that coming to know God is truly a life-long journey. In the living out of what we know of God's plan for us, we still have a long way to go. Yet, in God's, sometimes surprising, continued and ongoing revelation of Self, we can find encouragement and reminders of God's divine plan for us. Let *us* wake up to this manifestation of the divine in our lives, and in the lives of all people, especially in races and religions other than those familiar to us. Let us open our hearts more fully to all of God's people.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ The star led the Magi to Jesus. Who are the stars in your life that have led you to Jesus? How?
- ◆ Share an experience when you were surprised by God.
- ◆ How has your understanding of this feast grown over the years?
- ◆ Who are the people you find most difficult to treat as equals? Why?
- ◆ How does God's inclusiveness impact your perspective on the immigration issues with which our nation continues to struggle?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Seek out a person of the Islamic faith and find out what it is that we hold in common and what it is that we believe differently.
- ◆ Read **The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions** (*Nostra Aetate*) from the Documents of Vatican II. Let it enlighten your own understanding of the Church's desire to "acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among followers of other religions" as well as the values of their society and culture.
- ◆ As you begin this new year, work with a spiritual director who can companion you in your prayer and experiences of God in your life. Speak to your pastor or contact your diocesan office for information on how you might identify a spiritual director.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to reflect on what has been shared in this session. A selection of instrumental music is played. After some additional time of quiet following the music, members mention a word or phrase spoken during the session that moved them. When everyone has had the opportunity to speak, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

All: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Leader: Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.
May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

All: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Leader: The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts;
the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute.
All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

All: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Leader: For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.
He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

All: Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.

Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13

(Members stand in a circle, join hands and pray the Lord's Prayer.)