

CHILDREN

Have the children spend time in a procession of light – as they bring the magi to the center of the room, help them to connect to the wonder and awe of entering into the presence of Jesus.

Some questions for discussion you might have with them:

1. I wonder what it felt like to follow that star thru strange places to settle in the small town of Bethlehem?
2. Magi were from different places and different cultures: I wonder how they felt about the birth of this child? I wonder what Jesus meant to them?
3. I wonder what Jesus means to you? When I am afraid of the dark, I pray that Jesus might bring light; that Jesus might keep me safe; that Jesus might protect me. I wonder what you do when you are afraid of the dark?

The magi are important characters in the story of God becoming human in Jesus. They add connection to distant lands and distant cultures. They welcome Jesus with gifts – gifts fitting a ruler, but one who is special!

Close with prayer about the importance of Jesus – who is the light of the world; the light no darkness can overcome.

ADULTS

Grace, mercy and peace be yours in Christ Jesus our Lord, our light and our life. Amen.

Yes, it is easy to get caught up in the wonder of magi magically appearing – guided by a star that magically settles over the place of Jesus birth. This is the final piece of the magical story of Jesus' birth and we are still caught up in its reverie with a hope that all the bad things of our lives will simply disappear while we engage in a story that enthralls and captures us in its grandeur.

Yet lurking in the dark shadows is that niggling sense of threat – occupied here in this story by King Herod who threatens to snuff out the magical, mysterious epiphany of Jesus! You see, there is always danger lurking in the dark shadows of our lives threatening to capture us and hold us prisoner, or snuff out our life! It is why we grab onto the mystery and magic of this story. We want something better; we want an end to suffering, to hunger, to mean-spirited people, and terrorizing events. We want a happy ending that brings peace – we want peace to prevail in this new year more than anything else and this great story is about peace! So, we try to avoid the dark shadows looming – we find a way around those shadows. We go back by another road!

Yet, what if in those places where dark shadows loom – where the terrors of everyday living live large – What if that is where the Spirit guides us? What if it is in those places that we find the mission of being Christ in our world today. Oh... more on that later.

First, we need to understand the importance of this special coming. Isaiah has the lay of the land – he knows that darkness is only temporary; eventually light will dawn, and the light that is coming is greater than any light we can muster.

The opening line of Isaiah 60 is like a thunderbolt of glory. What surprises us as readers is the abruptness of the shift from doom and gloom to light and glory. Perhaps what is most surprising in this shift is God's response to the people's crooked ways and their sense of despair: they are not to mend their ways first (out of fear)! No, rather God comes, God erupts, God arises, God shines forth in glory! This prophecy is about God – making an appearance on this earth; an epiphany!

This coming, this shining forth is unconditional. God is always a God whose glory brings salvation. The people's repentance, the mending of ways, the living out of justice is a response to this coming! It is not an attempt to be made right with God but it is giving thanks for the one who comes, who reveals life and salvation in the midst of the community.

Who is this God who now enters into our midst? Who is this God who now actually shows us God's face, the face of a child? God's glory is no longer far off in some heavenly realm, experienced as a cloud, but it is calling all people together. Even the story of the magi is a call of a radical responsibility toward all those who have been excluded from our classical narrative. All are swept up in singing a cosmic doxology.

Yes, God appears and nothing can shine brighter than this cosmic glory of God – and as Christians, we claim the authority of God as centered in a little child. We celebrate this coming of enlightenment that clarifies for us a future born in hope and in action.

We all know the power of dark shadows and how they can threaten any and all with terror and distraction. We wonder what the future will bring, and sometimes our wondering cascades into dark forebodings that bring us bouts of panic and terror. Into those dark shadows comes a light that enlightens everything around us. Nothing of shadows remains because of whose we are and who remains with us no matter what.

That leads us to places where people live in darkness; where shadows and other creepy, crawly night things terrorize people. We are the light of Christ. If in Advent and Christmas we celebrated the coming of the light Christ; Epiphany is all about being the light of Christ for our world around

us. This is the bigger picture. Our world needs you, each of you to be the light of Christ that you claim you are! They need to find respite from all the night terrors that threaten their hopes and dreams. They need you!

So...here's the thing about the bigger picture of being Christ for the world around you. You never go alone. One, Christ is always with you. He promised this as he looked upon a world and a universe that he loved from the perch of a cross in the darkness that filled everything around him. He fulfilled that promise as his brightness shined forth and burst out of the tomb to make the tomb empty, and to redeem and save a world and live up to the name Joseph and Mary gave him!

So, look around you right now. Secondly, you have others on this path away from Bethlehem out into the world of shadows and deep darkness. They too are the light of Christ who go with you. And, there are others out there too! Countless faithful people who live and breathe in this world each day – some, who may even surprise you; may not look like you; may not believe everything you believe. They are out there too – being the light of God's grace and mercy in so many, many ways. You are not alone!

With all the uncertainty around work or finances or health or relationships; with the lack of clarity around the way the world is going, eg, climate issues, healthcare, protection of the least and the lost, etc. We

wonder what the future will bring. What is God calling WLLC to be and do in this new year? What major crossroads, crossing points, crossings, will we seek to traverse? Whatever they are, God with us Emmanuel is the bright shining star that leads the way; guiding us, propping us up when we need it, lending a shoulder to lean on when we feel nothing but despair, celebrating with us the little and big victories all along the way. God is with us!