

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Isaiah 60:1-6**

<sup>60:1</sup> Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. <sup>3</sup> Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. <sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

**Commentary**

There are two central themes in this passage: the glory of God and the call to Jerusalem to rise and reflect the brightness of that glory. The passage begins, "Arise, shine," a call to become light in response to the light of God shed abroad the world. This is an eschatological (future-looking) moment, a fulfillment of God's purposes. It begins with light, just as at the beginning of time when God said, "Let there be light." The bitterness of defeat at the hands of Babylon and the despair that settled over both the exiles and those who were left behind in Jerusalem made it seem as if total darkness covered the earth. Out of a moral and spiritual darkness came a brilliant new vision, like a spotlight shining on one small part of a darkened theater. The nations would be attracted to this light and come to Jerusalem. This is, certainly, a sad contrast to what we find today, when this city is the scene of continuing conflict and violence.

**Reflection**

What dark spots exist in your world right now? What gives you hope in the midst of such darkness, whether personal or global?

## **Ephesians 3:1-12**

<sup>3:1</sup> This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- <sup>2</sup> for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, <sup>3</sup> and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, <sup>4</sup> a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. <sup>5</sup> In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: <sup>6</sup> that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

### **Commentary**

God had a long-time secret that now had been made known—the Gentiles are also heirs to the promise! One of the basic human sins is contempt for persons different from ourselves. The great power in the Christian message is this: We are all included in God's love. God loves those sinners whom we judge inferior, just as much as ourselves, who sin by discriminating against others. Paul, who calls himself among the "least," delivers this important message. In Christ, there is a free approach to God, no matter where we find ourselves. We cannot draw closer to God without drawing closer to one another. This is true spatially, but also in terms of attitude and openness to those who are different. Just as in Isaiah's vision all people are drawn to God's altar, so does Ephesians proclaim that "through the Gospel [groups formerly divided are now] members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Jesus."

### **Reflection**

How does this message in Ephesians hold both judgment and hope for this situation we find ourselves in—an "us against them mentality"?

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

<sup>2:1</sup> In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told

him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> '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.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### **Commentary**

In the story of the Epiphany (meaning "manifestation" or "appearance," and referring specifically to God's self-revelation in Christ), Matthew gives Jesus' life a geographical and historical setting. He came into the real world, where Herod was King. In this world, the magi came from the East and asked, "Where was the King born?"—a key question for Matthew. The magi were following the star and tradition believes that they did not really need to ask for guidance. The magi were Persian or Babylonian priests, experts in astrology and dream interpretation. They studied the stars and believed that the appearance of a new star meant the birth of a king. They were Pagans (non-Jews) who had followed the bright light of that star on the long journey across the dessert. The religious leaders helped the magi by interpreting the Scriptures for them. They pointed out that Scripture (Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2) said the Messiah would be born of David's line, in Bethlehem of Judea, the city of David. The magi came, asking "where?" in a sense of wonder and excitement. Herod asked "where?" with fear and murder in his heart.

### **Reflection**

What form does asking "where" about Jesus take today?

### **Responsive Psalter**

### **Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

<sup>72:1</sup> Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

<sup>2</sup> May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

<sup>3</sup> May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

<sup>4</sup> May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

- <sup>5</sup> May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- <sup>6</sup> May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.
- <sup>7</sup> In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.
- <sup>10</sup> May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.
- <sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.
- <sup>12</sup> For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.
- <sup>13</sup> He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.
- <sup>14</sup> From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**