Seeking the Vision: a Service for Epiphany

*This service, which integrates the journey of the Magi, formed part of a “visioning process” undertaken by the congregation. It could be adapted to allow your congregation to think about their life and mission for the New Year.*

**Processional Hymn:** “The First Nowell” (*Voices United* 91)

**Call to Worship**(*Invite the congregation to raise their hands to their foreheads as if looking into the distance every time the word “see” or its derivative is mentioned*.)

**One:** The Magi came from many places to see the baby Jesus.

**Two:** We, too, have come from many places to worship together and see the Holy Spirit in one another.

**One:** The Magi brought gifts to offer the Child.

**Two:** We, too, bring gifts—ourselves, our hopes, our dreams, the visions we see.

**One:** The Magi travelled to Bethlehem and saw a great light.

**Two:** We, too, travel to Bethlehem and then return to our homes, moved by what we have seen.

**Opening Prayer** (*Read by three people dressed as Magi.**They begin at the back of the church and walk to the front, carrying three gifts. They set the gifts on the communion table and then sit in the front pews.*)

**Magi:** Guiding God, bless us on the road we have chosen to seek your star. Light our paths that we may not walk in darkness, but walk with you, the light of the world. Enable us to bring gifts worthy of the Christ child. Teach us to be wise and to risk sharing our unique visions for the world. Amen.

**Story Time**(*conversation with the children at the front of the sanctuary*)

(*The Magi come to the front of the sanctuary and pick up their gifts.*)

**Magus 1:** What do you think is in this box?

(*children respond*)

**Magus 2:** That’s right. We’ve brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh for baby Jesus.

**Magus 3:** We prayed long and hard about what we could bring to Jesus. It had to be something really good.

**Magus 1:** I brought gold because it is a symbol of wealth and power, and I knew that Jesus was going to be the most powerful person on earth.

**Magus 2:** I brought frankincense, which I had to special order from a place faraway. Frankincense is burned during worship, and I knew that a number of people in the world were going to worship God because of the birth of baby Jesus.

**Magus 3:** And I brought myrrh to Jesus. Myrrh was used by spiritual leaders to anoint people. (*pretends to anoint the other Magi so that the children know what the word means*)It was also used as medicine. I knew that Jesus was going to be the kind of spiritual leader that heals the sick and lonely.

**Magus 1:** There are lots of other things that we brought the baby Jesus—many things that you can’t even wrap in a box—like love, for example.

**Magus 2:** (*to the children and the congregation*) What kinds of things do you think you could bring to the baby Jesus?

(*As suggestions are made, one of the Magi writes them down on a piece of paper. Another of the Magi puts the suggestions in a box, wraps it with colourful paper and a bow, and leaves it on the communion table with the other three gifts.*)

**Magus 3:** Let’s pray together. Holy God, thank you for giving us the baby Jesus. Help us to remember how lucky we are to have him—he is a real gift to us. Help us to give Jesus the best of ourselves—our love, our friendship, our time. Amen.

(*Children leave for Sunday school, and the Magi sit in the front pew.*)

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 2:1–3

**Dramatic Presentation**

**Magus 1:** We’ve travelled all this way to Jerusalem, and the child who has been born King of the Jews isn’t even here.

**Magus 2:** My feet are aching, and I’m so tired. Where did we go wrong? It seems logical that the King of the Jews would have been born in Herod’s palace...where else would a king be born?

**Magus 3:** I don’t know...I’m so tired and I’m not sure where we should go from here. Let’s just sit down for a minute and think.

(*They sit on the stairs at the front of the sanctuary and gaze at the sky.*)

**Magus 2:** Hey, do you see that?

**Magus 1:** What?

**Magus 2:** That star formation over there. (*pointing*)

**Magus 3:** Hey yah...that’s it. There it is. I think we’ve been travelling in the wrong direction. We need to take a different path. We need to follow our hearts and our intuition and let our vision take us.

**Magus 1:** You’re right. Come on. Let’s go.

(*The Magi walk to the right.*)

**Reflection**

(*Leader gives an outline of what the congregation did in the previous year, and how the journey of the Magi parallels the kind of search a congregation has in defining its mission.*) The vision of a star led the Magi to the baby Jesus. They travelled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. Where will our vision take us? Today’s service is the first service in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is a word that means revelation. Epiphanies are often surprising and shocking. What is your vision for our church? What is **our** vision? (*raise specific concerns about the life of the congregation*)

**Hymn:** “Will You Come and See the Light?” (*Voices United* 96)

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 2:3–12

**Dramatic Presentation**

(*The Magi begin at the back of the sanctuary and walk down the centre aisle.*)

**Magus 1:** We’ve been travelling for such a long time now.

**Magus 2:** The star is growing and becoming brighter, but we’re not there yet.

**Magus 3:** I have to admit, friends, that it’s taken us so long to get to the one who was born King of the Jews, that at times I have felt discouraged—I’ve felt like giving up.

**Magus 2:** Yah, me too. It has gotten so hot and dusty that I haven’t been sure we are headed in the right direction. I’ve had to learn to trust my intuition as well as trusting you folks. I’ve had to have a lot of faith.

**Magus 1:** You know...I don’t even know what kind of king we’ll meet. It’s really difficult to continue on the journey when the other end seems so unclear.

**Magus 2:** It is a little unnerving...but you know, I keep looking ahead to the star and when I get a small glimpse of it, it’s as if a warm energy encompasses me and I have the will to go on.

**Magus 3:** Just look at the star! Tonight’s such a clear night, I feel like I could just reach out and touch it.

**Magus 1:** Yah, me too.

**Magus 2:** Hey, l’ve got an idea. Let’s just stop and pretend we can touch it. Let’s dream a little.

(*The three Magi reach out into the air for a few seconds and then sit in the front pew.*)

**Reflection**

(*An outline of some dreams for the church. This can be done by one and/or several people—clergy, lay, and people of different ages*.)

**Hymn:** “I Am the Light of the World” (*Voices United* 87)

**Prayer:** “An Epiphany Prayer” (unison) (*Voices United* 86)

**Presentation of Offerings and Gifts**

During the next few weeks, we will be walking with Jesus to explore new possibilities for our church. We will bring our own personal spiritual gifts as well as the spiritual gifts of the community to this process. As the Magi brought forward gifts to Jesus, we, too, will bring gifts of time and spiritual discipline to God.

(*Different members of the congregation present spiritual gifts. Each person, in turn, walks to the front of the sanctuary and places the gift on the table alongside the Magi’s gifts.*)

**Person 1:** I bring the gifts of these “Upper Room Daily Devotion Guides” for any who might want to read them.

**Person 2:** I bring the gift of these daily Bible reading lessons to the table for any who might want to use them.

**Person 3:** I bring the gift of meeting space in my house for a small group wishing to explore prayer.

**Person 4:** I bring the gift of three workshops to the table: journalling, liturgical dance, and visual arts.

(*Others come forward as they are moved, and all resources are placed on the table. Later the table is placed in the hall for display at coffee time. The congregation was also encouraged to fill out personal covenant forms and bring them forward with their offerings. These were then tacked to a wall divider which became a “Covenant Wall” and displayed at coffee time over the next few weeks.*)

**Offering** (*The congregation came forward with their offerings, placed them on the Communion Table, and stood in a circle around the sanctuary for communion.*)

**Communion**

**Closing Hymn:** “We Are Marching” (VU #646)

**Commissioning and Benediction**

**One:** Scripture tells us that following their encounter with Jesus, the Magi had to find a different path home. So it is with us. We, too, will be changed by our spiritual encounters with God and our resulting visions. May all our actions bring glory to God!

**Two:** Glory to the Creator who inspires us with vision! Glory to Christ who teaches us how to live out our vision! Glory to the Spirit who breathes life into our vision!

**One:** Let us receive and reveal God’s vision through the grace of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. May the blessing of the Holy One be with us all. Amen!

***Trisha Elliott,*** *then at White Oaks U.C., London, Ont.*

*First published in* ***Gathering Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2001–2002****. Reproduced here with permission of the author. Please credit the author.*

Epiphany Stewardship Service

This service could also be used for the week of an annual congregational meeting.

**Call to Worship**

One: Arise, shine, for your light has come,

**All: and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.**

One: Arise, shine, for God’s love fills this house of prayer.

**All: Arise, shine, for God’s love flows through us and knows us by name.**

One: Arise, shine, for truly the Lord is in this place and in this space.

**All: Arise, shine, for we are the people of God.**

**Prayer of Approach**

O Holy One, we gather here in this house of prayer to give thanks and to celebrate your incredible presence in our midst. We lift up to you our songs of praise, the prayers of our hearts, the gifts of our resources. We gather here in your name, ready to listen to your presence stirring within our lives—moving us, shaping us, leading us. God of Grace, we offer to you our lives, in the name of Jesus, our light. Amen.

**Prayers of Reconciliation**

Gracious God, deliver us from evil. Deliver us as we share with you the moments when we turn away from you, and from each other—our neighbours, families, friends, co-workers, strangers, and enemies; as we share with you the moments when we abandon our own integrity and faith for whatever reasons; as we share with you what we hoard for ourselves as if we can protect what we think of as our stuff from being shared in your name. In silence, we share with you our prayers of confession....

**Assurance**

God of reconciled relationships, God who knew us before we were formed in our mother’s womb and who will remember us long after we pass from this earth, forgive us, restore us, renew us. Let your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, so that we will realize humility to accept forgiveness from you, from others, and for ourselves. Share with us the courage to forgive one another so that we can break bread together, reconciled in your name. Now and forever we trust in you and you alone, in you in whom we find rest for our soul. In thanksgiving and praise we pray. Amen.

**Theme Time with Children**

(*Re-enact the Magi’s journey with the children. Begin in one part of the sanctuary. Slowly make your way toward Bethlehem—where one might have Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Roman military, travellers, and so on. As you travel, following a star, talk about dreams, about following where God leads one’s heart, about being tired, uncertain, and about having doubts. You might talk about how the Magi had to gather some money, food, and friends for their journey. It would be great to intersperse your conversation with questions about*

*• cost… How much do you think that trip cost? More then a trip to Disneyland?*

*• practicality… Why bother? What are we going to find anyway?*

*• time… Do you know how long this will take?*

*About halfway on your journey, you and your friends might meet King Herod for a brief conversation about his dark desire to meet the newborn king. Finally, your journey should end at Jesus, sharing the gifts that you have brought. At this point, you might ask some questions about whether the journey was worth all of that work. Was it worth gathering up money, food, and friends, and travelling all that way just to bring Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh? You might end your circle time connecting the story with your congregation and its mission—gathering and sharing money, food, and friends to live in God’s mission. Finally, together, you might pray...*)

Dear God, thank you for stories that remind us to share. Thank you for money, food, and friends. Thank you for the Magi who gave Jesus gifts. Thank you for all of the people in your church who help others. Thank you for caring about us. Help us to remember to care for others. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

**Stewardship Sermon Starter**

(Matthew 2:1–12)

In a time when talk about stewardship quickly disintegrates into talk about fundraising and having enough, let us remember the journey of the Magi. They followed the Spirit in spite of their personal costs and the amount of time their journey took, in spite of King Herod’s thinly veiled threat. The Magi continued on their journey until they were able to lay their gifts down in the presence of Jesus, gifts that we continue to talk about today. What would have been the result if the Magi had simply said, “No, it costs too much to go all that way,” or if they had fallen into Herod’s trap, or if they had said right from the beginning, “It’s only a star. Forget about it, stop dreaming!”? How would your congregation respond today?

**Offering Invitation and Dedication Prayer**

**Invitation**

**Leader:** Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

**People:** We arise and shine and see the light that is in our midst. We offer to God our very essence of being, the gifts of our lives.

**Dedication**

God of light and love, hope and healing, we give thanks for your abundant grace that blesses us and calls us out of the shadows and dark places in our lives. May our offering bring light and grace to those both near and far from us. Amen.

**Prayer for Board Meeting or Congregational Gathering**

God of celebration, banquets, and laughter, we give thanks for your generosity and abundant table. We give thanks for your Spirit that fills so many, that blesses so many, that inspires so many. We give thanks for the numerous volunteers who give of themselves with compassion and with integrity. We give thanks for the lives that our volunteers touch in spoken and unspoken ways. We give thanks for our chairs of board, our treasurers, and our secretaries. We give thanks for those who lead, who follow, who raise their voices, who lift their hands. We give thanks to those who share their money, their time, and their abilities for your mission in our midst. We give thanks for those who bring their families and those who welcome people as if they were family. We give thanks for your Son, who inspires us to share, to forgive, and to love one another. We ask your blessings on our lives as we live in God’s mystery that is here and now and still yet to come. Amen.

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