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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA
Wednesday, January 6, 2021
The Epiphany, Revised Common Lectionary
[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)
[Ephesians 3:1-12](#)
[Matthew 2:1-12](#)
[Psalm 72:1-7,10-14](#)

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An epiphany is something you can't un-see, once you've seen it.

An epiphany is a sudden glimpse of truth.

Sages from the east came to Judea looking for a king. Of course there was a king already. He did not receive the news of another king gladly. King Herod was a ruler who loved power and loved being in power. He was a ruthless man, a violent man, and he tried to maintain his throne by violence. He had no understanding that true leadership comes from humility, and service, and telling the truth.

The sages found their way to Bethlehem and honored the child they found there. And then they went home by another road, changed by what they had seen.

Each of us has met Jesus, just as they did. Somehow in your life you have encountered the Christ, and something in you has responded to him—or else you wouldn't be here tonight. Each of us has been changed somehow by the epiphany of God in human flesh. And though we all fail over and over again to live it out, that epiphany is working within us to transform us into something more like Jesus, into the kind of people who practice humility, and service, and telling the truth.

There are negative epiphanies too. One of them surely happened today. We will never unsee the scenes of rioters streaming through the Capitol building, undermining democracy while calling themselves patriots. The violence and mayhem we have seen today are the fruit of many weeks and months of lies, a false and parallel universe of lies about a stolen election created by a president incapable of admitting defeat and desperate to maintain his power. They are the fruit of years

of willingness on the part of respectable-seeming political leaders, not only the president, who have been willing to flirt and wink at white nationalism and at toxic conspiracy theories in order to garner votes or avoid angering a base. They are the fruit of decades of worsening inequality and constricting opportunities for working people and of a stalled civil rights movement. They are the fruit of centuries of racial hierarchy and our failure to truly atone for, or even acknowledge, the foundational role of slavery and colonization in our national story.

Maybe the events of today will cause us to see those truths more clearly, in a new light. Maybe they will force a reckoning as what has been whispered is now shouted from the rooftops and what has been done in the dark is now brought into the light.

What I know is that we who call ourselves Christian have committed ourselves to the path of the newborn one whose way is peace and service and justice and truth. Like the Magi, we are called to bow to the Christ child and not to King Herod. Not to the politics of power over, but to the politics of power with and power for. Not to the manipulation of truth but to the sharing of truth. Not to violence against others but to nonviolent resistance.

And what I also know is that even though most of us in this gathering tonight are citizens of this nation, proudly and lovingly so, we also have a loyalty and a citizenship that is infinitely higher. God's purposes are for all the world and all of creation. And God can redeem this world with a healthy United States of America or a sick one or even without one at all. I long and pray for a healthy one and it is our duty to do everything we can for that. But like the Magi, like Jesus, like the saints throughout the ages, we don't get to pick the times we are born in or the political circumstances around us. We aren't guaranteed a peaceful life or a stable society, as Christians from Iraq to South Sudan to Venezuela to North Korea have known for a very long time. We do have an assurance that the one whom we glimpse revealed to us tonight will never leave us or forsake us.

So tonight we bow and bring our gifts to the one who has been born to bring peace, to give himself for us even at the cost of his own suffering and his own life, and to rise again in power that is greater than the power of the kings of this world. The one who says to us, "Do not be afraid, for I have overcome the world."