

The Second Sunday following
Christmas
3 January 2021

Observance of the feast of the Epiphany

Grace Episcopal Church
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Honesdale, PA

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The Second Week of Christmas, 2021
Virtual Grace
Observance of the feast of the Epiphany

Organ Prelude -

“*We Three Kings of Orient Are*”

J. Henry Hopkins, Jr.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hello and welcome to “Virtual Grace”
from Grace Episcopal Church in Honesdale, PA,
as we continue to celebrate the story of Christ’s birth.
Today, we continue the story of the ‘after,’
skipping a little ahead a few days with the story in Matthew’s account
of the coming of the Magi to visit the Baby Jesus
(who would normally commemorated on Wednesday, January 6th),
but nothing has been normal, nor *was* normal in the 1st century!

I’m Fr. Ed, the rector of our parish, and we’re glad you’re here in “Virtual Grace,”
not knowing when our doors will be open again for in-person worship
and the offering of the Blessed Sacraments.

We know so many people are struggling - financially, socially, personally,
especially in this holiday season.

It is our mission to aid any and everyone in whatever way we can,
to spread the Good News of Salvation
in whatever situation someone may find themselves.

We appreciate all the help, donations, best wishes and prayers
that have been offered to the Church.

If you, or anyone you know, are in any pastoral need at all, call me, 24/7.

I am more than ready to come to your spiritual aid and visit with a mask.

Now, let us join our hearts and souls in praise to God,
as we remember the gifts of the Magi, and a special gift of a cripple boy.
Let us always remember that our salvation lies only
in our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, in this life and in the world to come.

CONFESSION & ASSURANCE of PARDON

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8,9

Let us confess our sins against God and our fellow sisters and brothers.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive our sins through our savior Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen us in all goodness, ✝ and keep us in eternal life. Amen.

COLLECT of the DAY

Let us pray...

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Hear words from the prophet Isaiah.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 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. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 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. 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. 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.

Here ends the Reading.

GRADUAL

Psalm 72: 1-2, 10-11, 15-18

Give the King your justice, O God, *
and your righteousness to the King's Son;
That he may rule your people righteously *
and the poor with justice;
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, *
and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.
All kings shall bow down before him, *
and all the nations do him service.
Long may he live! and may there be given to him gold from Arabia; *
may prayer be made for him always,
and may they bless him all the day long.
May his Name remain for ever and be established as long as the sun endures;
may all the nations bless themselves in him and call him blessed.
Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, *
who alone does wondrous deeds!
And blessed be his glorious Name for ever! *
and may all the earth be filled with his glory. Amen. Amen.

SECOND READING

Matthew 2:1-12

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'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.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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." 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Here ends the Reading.

MEDITATION

"BOXING DAY"

I confess to starting this meditation last Saturday,

December 26th - taking a break from Rectory cleaning.

It's Boxing Day, begun originally in England as a little Christmas
to give gifts to the poor.

It's devolved to a shopping for bargains day, the day after Christmas,
another Black Friday, or in this case Saturday.

I learned it as a day you took the boxes of the gifts you didn't want,
to exchange the sweater Aunt Rosie bought you,
for a designer dress you've wanted.

For me, Boxing Day started the cleaning process
by taking empty boxes to the County Recycling Center.

The added element is that Sue was off this week after Christmas,
and decided she was going to start cleaning out stuff.

That was a part of my New Year's Resolution two years ago.

If I get rid of one thing each week, that 50 or more things gone.

Yes, some were probably presents from Christmases past,
others things I needed, or wanted, when,
but their usefulness is for someone else now.

I tried to get rid of an old toboggan,

but Sue wouldn't let me drive it to the kids in New Jersey.

Cross Country skis that friends gave us years ago that I enjoyed using,

but are past my prime now, and I'd have to buy new boots,

to replace the ones Gerry and Connie gave us.

And later this week as I continue to work on this meditation,

Sue and I have been cleaning out closets and drawers -

with a trip to Sally's Boutique.

Boxing Day.

A time to exchange things,

and the beginning of another year to get rid of things.

Today we see unwanted gifts in the continuing story of Christmas:

Gold, Incense, Myrrh.

A crutch.

The Choir has heard me tell this story over and over.

The feast of the Epiphany has a special hold over me.

I was the Organist-Choirmaster at Christ Church in Williamsport,

whose Rector in the mid 1800s was John Henry Hopkins,

the author and composer of "We Three Kings."

The other special hold of Epiphany and the Three Kings for me,

is the Gian-Carlo Menotti operetta, Amahl and the Night Visitors.

The first Amahl on the original Hallmark channel production
with the NBC Symphony Orchestra,
the first Amahl was the son of my college choral professor!
One King seeking Jesus, asks Mother, "Do you know a child,"
and in mournful response she replies, "I know a child,"
thinking of her own son.

Amahl, a crippled Arab boy,
is moved by three strange travelers bearing wild gifts
to take his own crutch to the baby Jesus.

"Mother, let me go with the kings - I will take him my crutch.
Who knows, he may need one, and this I made myself."

Then a miracle occurs, and the Wiseman Melchoir proclaims,
"Look, Mother, he can dance, he can jump, he can run."

So Amahl is allowed to go along to the manger with the Visitors
and present the crutch to the baby, for "Who knows,
he may need one, and I made it myself."

I can imagine Mary and Joseph looking at the Gifts and wondering,
"The gold we can certainly use.

Maybe we can take the incense and myrrh back to the sellers tomorrow.
And exchange them.

But what about this crutch?"

"Mary, I know the boy means well, but..."

And Mary replies, "it is the gift of a miracle, laid before our baby.

A memento for us to remember this humble day forever.

Who knows, you or I may need it some day - you are getting old!"

"Thanks," with a smile, "Darling Mary. Thanks for reminding me."

But I wonder about that crutch.

Jesus, of course didn't need a crutch.

But I wonder, miracle of miracles,

did Amahl's crutch grow over the years, and became the shepherd's crook
as Jesus himself becomes the Great Shepherd of the Sheep?

Did the shepherd's crook become the walking staff which aided Jesus
on his journey's of healing others throughout Judea?

And miracle of miracles, did that lowly crutch from a loving Arab boy
grow into the tree that brought us Salvation in the end as the Cross of Christ?

Who knows what a gift may become,
as unusual and quizzical and whimsical as it may seem at first.

Unwrap that thought for yourself,
and treasure the mystery of the unusual - that one gift you should keep.

Jesus, the Savior, the little Child born in a manger.

What do you do with *that?!?*

Let us offer the words of our faith using the Apostles' Creed.

The CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection ☩ of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Justin, the Archbishop of Canterbury; Michael, our Presiding Bishop; Kevin, our Bishop; and for all ministers and faithful. Pray for the Church.

Silence

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Remember those around the world who have not heard of the love of God. Pray for justice and peace at home and abroad.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, those in prison, those separated from loved ones, for the sick, the crippled children, the disabled elderly and those suffering from Covid-19 symptoms. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

Silence

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially those who have succumbed to the virus, and those killed by violent acts. Pray for those who have died.

Silence

I ask your thanksgiving for loved ones, and the creative ways they and we have found to share our love, especially in this holy season. Pray for our families wherever they may be.

Silence

To sum up all these petitions, let us pray together in the words which Christ himself taught us, saying:

Our Father...

BLESSING

May Almighty God, who led the Wise Men by the shining of a star to find the Christ, the Light from Light, lead you also, in your pilgrimage, to find the Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty - Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer - keep you in Grace and Love this day and forever. *Amen.*

In our various ways, let us go forth and like the 3 Kings - and Amahl - proclaim to the world the love of God as has been made known to us.

Organ Postlude -

“Wie schön leuchtet die Morgenstern”

setting by Dietrich Buxtehüde

THREE KINGS OF ORIENT

words and music by the Rev'd John Henry Hopkins, Jr.

in the Hymnal 1982

original version in the Hymnal 1940

Three Kings We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder Star.

Chorus (*all*): O, star of wonder, star of might,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Gaspard Born a King on Bethlehem's plain;
Gold I bring to crown Him again;
King forever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign. *Chorus*

Melchior Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship Him, God on High. *Chorus*

Balthazar Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Seal'd in the stone-cold tomb. *Chorus*

Three Kings: Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and sacrifice,
Heaven sings, "Hallelujah!"
"Hallejajah!" the earth replies. *Chorus*

search for:

Gian Carlo Menotti: *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Hallmark Hall of Fame, 1951.