

## Interactive lesson



picture from <https://record.adventistchurch.com/2018/12/24/how-many-wise-men-were-there-and-were-they-really-kings/>

What does “epiphany” mean? <Let them respond>

According to Wikipedia, “an experience of a sudden and striking realization.” The Oxford Dictionary indicates it comes from a Greek word meaning “reveal.”

Do you know why it is used in reference to the wise men visiting Jesus? <Let them respond>

In the presentation of the gifts, the infant Jesus was revealed for who He truly was. Scholars say the gifts represent specific things about Jesus. Do you know what those are? <Let them respond>

**Gold** – as crowns human kings, heir to King David

**Frankincense** – used in temple worship, son of God

**Myrrh** – anointing and embalming oil, sent to lead the people and die for our sins

What does it tell you that the infant was given those gifts then, rather than waiting until He was older?

<Let them respond>

Just as God planned to dwell with us, let us plan in this new year to grow closer in relationship with God and with one another.

## Gospel lesson

Listen to this familiar story, and consider how many wise men are mentioned, what they look like, what their names are, what companions and animals they traveled with, and what time of year these events take place.

*picture from*

### Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)

<sup>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.

*The word of God for the people of God*

## Message: Living the Celebration



picture adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Guide of our lives, as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

that we may navigate through life in the warmth of Your glory, with better understanding of who we are and how best to love You. Amen.



### Company's Coming



- ♥ November 29 – This Place is a Mess!
- ♥ December 6 – Clean-up Crew
- ♥ December 13 – Deck the Halls
- ♥ December 20 – Waiting on the Threshold
- ♥ December 24 – Welcoming the Guest
- ♥ December 27 – Enjoying the Company
- ♥ **January 3 – Living the Celebration**

Now at the end of this worship series, we are “Living the Celebration.”

“We’re wrapping up Christmas this week. Some may have already packed everything away; others may still be sitting in the glow of the lights and tinsel. But the goal isn’t to shuffle it all away,

but rather to embrace the fullness of the community that we have become – incorporating the new but becoming one in Christ.”

Happy New Year! It's 2021 at last! What a year we survived, huh? I do not think there was any major catastrophe that did not happen last year, do you?



picture from <https://faithequip.org/the-book-of-ezra-nehemiah/>

Looking back at the Israelites, you could say what a time they survived, waiting for the Messiah! They struggled through their exile and return to Jerusalem, only to struggle in rebuilding it.

It was during this rebuilding that Isaiah prophesied as we heard in the Old Testament reading today – hope for the people that not only would their oppression end, but that the people of God would be glorified.

This kind of return to their heyday under King David was what the people dreamed of. The psalmist, traditionally believed to be David praying for his son, asks for God's glory to be bestowed on the leader of the people, one who serves their needs.

But even during the reconstruction of the temple and the ensuing decades, the Hebrews were subject to the rule of others – Romans in particular, for over a century before Jesus was born.



picture from <http://www.farsinet.com/wisemen/magi.html>

Then their Messiah arrived at last! An end to the misery was coming! The event even had the gifts of gold and frankincense that Isaiah had prophesied – maybe brought by a multitude of camels, if that is what the wise men rode in on.

But it was not quite what they expected.

The Hebrews were not made into the richest kingdom, nor the kingdom with the most powerful military on the planet when Jesus arrived. They were still subject to Roman rule, not in charge themselves.

It was “just” a baby born to common people. After the magi had come and gone, He faded into insignificance, unnoticed – even lost for a couple of days when He came of age (twelve) at the temple – until baptized by John at the start of His ministry.

And some Messiah Jesus turned out to be when He grew up: this guy wandering around the countryside telling the temple leaders everything they did wrong instead of praising them for having status among the Chosen people! Why should they change how they did things at the word of this loudmouth commoner?

God was not simply setting descendants of Abraham above other people. God came to call all peoples into proper relationship with their Creator. The Hebrews were supposed to be modeling that, but had gotten so wrapped up in their own lives that they lost sight of their role - their obligation to the rest of the world, to show how God blesses those who follow Him, how important it is to worship the one true God.

I find it striking how the magi foreigners accepted the truth about Jesus much more readily than His own people did.



<https://www.agnusday.org/comics/847/Matthew-02-01-12-2019>



Ironic, huh? Yet people demonstrate similar irony across the ages.



picture from  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/to-the-point/point-new-way-view-small-church-vitality/>

It seems that most people nowadays dream of a return to normal interactions like we had before 2020 – to when we could meet in person with hugs before worship and coffee hour afterwards, to when we invited as many people as possible to join us in person for our activities.

We know there will be an end to the social distancing. We started meeting in person for a while! An end to the pandemic is coming! We even have vaccines starting to be distributed.

But it is not quite what we expected. So what do we do when we pack away all the Christmas decorations?

Because the vaccine is slow to roll out, not instantaneous given to everyone, we have to continue dealing with the pandemic for some time yet. So even when we do get back in the building, we will maintain social distancing for a while.



We have had to be creative in new ways to worship (via Zoom) and to make a concerted effort to reach out more to one another. Even when we do get back to in person with hugs, there will be people we need to actively seek out, to reconnect with, and technology will still be in use for folks to connect from home.

But the goal is not just numbers at Sunday worship. Our goal as Christians is to share the Good News – that God loves us so much, He came in person – as a human – to work on our relationships with Him personally and with one another.

God is still active in our lives! Just because we are putting away the Christmas decorations does not mean we stop sharing that wonder, that love! We can live it all year long!



picture from <https://witnessministry.christians.co.za/2020/06/10/our-family-from-zim-says-thank-you/>

So we need to get more diligent, more creative, about sharing God's Word with all people beyond the holidays.

† Putting away a wreath? Maybe when we take that down, we send flowers to someone cooped up in an assisted living facility.

- † Carefully taking down and stowing Christmas lights? Maybe we tell someone how they light up our lives – each day, even. Or just light up someone’s day with a friendly smile.
- † Maybe when we take down our Christmas tree, we work on a phone tree for outreach to others.
- † Perhaps when we remove our Christmas cards from wherever we displayed them, we begin to mail a note weekly to someone shut in or isolated.
- † Throwing away leftovers? Maybe that reminds us to deliver fresh food for someone with little of it.

God came to us, blessed us with love and support. It is our turn now, not just once a year, but throughout the year, to do likewise for all of God’s children. It is for us to **live the celebration** always that is life in Christ.

Now let us respond with

*<Doxology>*

**Affirmation from I Timothy 2:5-6; 1:15; 3:16 UMH #889**

*Leader:*

There is one God

and there is one mediator, Christ Jesus,

who came as a ransom for all, to whom we testify.

*People:*

**The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance:**

That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. Great indeed is the mystery of the gospel. Amen.

*<Prayer of Dedication and Pastoral Prayer>*

Let us pray:

God of new seasons, new life, and new mercies, we take in the new with you. We trust you as you do new things. We look forward to the new hearts, the new lives that will see you, and a world where you'll make all things new.

You hold our world in your hands and spin it on its axis every day with a new sunrise and a new sunset. God, you are the same yesterday, today, and forevermore, and you have a tradition of doing new things to and in us. We offer ourselves to you, again, this year. Take us into the new with you. We also ask for Your help and wisdom as we raise up these concerns on our hearts today:

- Healing touch and comfort for all who are ailing.
  - Coronavirus victims - isolated; school; out-of-work; health care workers (especially: Marie Curri, Laura Davis, Nicole Marshall, Vince Marshall, Heidi Newton, Jennifer Tibbens-Scalzo) & those serving critical needs
  - -
  - **Connie Wright** - recovery at least 2 months in hospital
  - -

- -
- -
- -
- Thanks for
  - -
  - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
  - Travelers
  - Family far off
- Social unrest - dismantle racism and reform problem systems
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Help us to be fearless in talking about our faith as a normal part of daily living.
  - For the sake of this our local church, one part of Your great church, guide each one of us this week to invite someone to come know You better.
  - Help us to encourage one another toward faith in You and toward living together in true Christian community.

All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,  
<The Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "We Three Kings" UMH #254>

<Benediction>



background adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/companys-coming/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-year-b-graphics>

Go now filled with the Joy and Peace  
of our glorious Savior.

Keep His love foremost in your heart,  
sharing it with all whom you encounter,  
that everyone may come to know  
and treasure life in Jesus.