

PSParish Support Pack

EPIPHANY

CONTENTS

Background	Page 2.
Prayers	Page 5.
Benedictions	Page 8.
Prayers of the people	Page 10.
Children's Service	Page 21.
Assemblies	Page 24.
The 12 Days	Page 27.
Web based sermon sources	Page 29.
Sermon illustrations	Page 32.
Sermon starters	Page 33.
Poetry	Page 35.

EPIPHANY - BACKGROUND

These articles could be adapted for us in a parish magazine or order of service.

BACKGROUND 1

The Feast of the Epiphany (epiphany means "manifestation", "revelation") is the oldest of the Christmas feasts and is still celebrated on January 6th as the major feast of the season by the eastern Christian churches.

The feast probably began in those churches in the Middle East strongly influenced by the Gospel of John, who proclaimed of Jesus Christ:

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth. (John 1,14)

As " the true light, which enlightens everyone " come into the world, Jesus came not only that we might see his glory but also that we might share in it. "From his fullness we have all received, grace for grace." (John 1:16)

His baptism in the Jordan and his presence at the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee (two themes from John's gospel still closely connected with the Feast of the Epiphany) portray Jesus revealed as God's Son and uniting humanity to himself.

From earliest times the Feast of the Epiphany, like Easter, was a day for baptising those who believed in his name. To them, "he gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12) The story of the Magi, from Matthew's gospel, celebrates the call of God to all peoples to share in the grace of Jesus Christ. "The Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel." (Ephesians 3:5-6)

Historians see the Feast of the Epiphany originating from early Jewish-Christian celebrations of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated God's glory in covenant, light and water. In John's gospel this same Jewish feast often becomes the setting for the question: Who is Jesus Christ? (cf John 7-10)The gospel affirms, as does this feast, he is God's divine Son.

Epiphany is the day the Wise Men came from the east to worship the baby Jesus in Bethlehem and to give him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh which were very expensive.

The season of Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, and for nearly a month Christians await the coming of Christ in a spirit of expectation, singing hymns of longing. Then, on December 25, Christmas Day itself ushers in twelve days of celebration, ending only on January 6 with the feast of the Epiphany. Exhortations to follow this calendar rather than the secular one have become routine at this time of year. But often the focus falls on giving Advent its due, with the Twelve Days of Christmas relegated to the

words of a cryptic traditional carol. Most people are simply too tired after Christmas Day to do much celebrating.

The "real" twelve days of Christmas are important because they give us a way of reflecting on what the Incarnation means in our lives. Christmas commemorates the most momentous event in human history—the entry of God into the world He made, in the form of a baby.

The three traditional feasts (dating back to the late fifth century) that follow Christmas reflect different ways in which the mystery of the Incarnation works itself out in the body of Christ. December 26 is the feast of St. Stephen—a traditional day for giving leftovers to the poor (as described in the carol "Good King Wenceslas"). As one of the first deacons, Stephen was the forerunner of all those who show forth the love of Christ by their generosity to the needy. But more than this, he was the first martyr of the New Covenant, witnessing to Christ by the ultimate gift of his own life.

St. John the Evangelist, commemorated on December 27, is traditionally the only one of the twelve disciples who did *not* die a martyr. Rather, John witnessed to the Incarnation through his words, turning Greek philosophy on its head with his affirmation, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, KJV).

On December 28, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Innocents, the children murdered by Herod. These were not martyrs like Stephen, who died heroically in a vision of the glorified Christ. They were not inspired like John to speak the Word of life and understand the mysteries of God. They died unjustly. In them we see the long agony of those who suffer and die through human injustice.

In the Middle Ages, these three feasts were each dedicated to a different part of the clergy. Stephen, fittingly, was the patron of deacons. The feast of John the Evangelist was dedicated to the priests, and the feast of the Holy Innocents was dedicated to young men training for the clergy and serving the altar.

January 1 is the feast of Christ's circumcision (which was also one of the earliest feasts of the Virgin Mary, and is today celebrated as such by Roman Catholics). Jesus submitted to be circumcised according to the teaching of Moses.

Finally, on Epiphany (January 6), the celebration of Christmas comes to an end. Epiphany commemorates the beginning of the proclamation of the gospel—Christ's manifestation to the nations, as shown in three different events: the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and the turning of water into wine. In some regions the Feast of the Epiphany is also called the Feast of the Holy Kings or Three King's Day. Gifts are given in memory of the Magi's gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Homes are blessed with holy water, in remembrance of that blessed home where the Magi found the Child and his mother. The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus usually follows the celebration of this feast in the western church.

Generally in the Western tradition, the Magi predominate. But in the Eastern churches, Jesus' baptism tends to be the primary theme.

BACKGROUND 2

Significance of Epiphany in the Church

As with most aspects of the Christian liturgical calendar, Epiphany has theological

significance as a teaching tool in the church. The Wise Men or Magi who brought gifts to the child Jesus were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus as "King" and so were the first to "show" or "reveal" Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. This act of worship by the Magi, which corresponded to Simeon's blessing that this child Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), was one of the first indications that Jesus came for all people, of all nations, of all races, and that the work of God in the world would not be limited to only a few.

The day is now observed as a time of focusing on the mission of the church in reaching others by "showing" Jesus as the Saviour of all people. It is also a time of focusing on Christian brotherhood and fellowship, especially in healing the divisions of prejudice and bigotry that we all too often create between God's

EPIPHANY PRAYERS

God of majesty and humility,
may our faith in you be bold;
may our fears be small,
our delight shine like the Magi's star.
From east to west and north to south,
you are our saviour
in this world and the next.
Amen

God of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany,
you have given us many promises and prophecies
about your son Jesus Christ's birth,
and they have been fulfilled.
May we see from the past to the present,
the present into the future,
that your loving hand guides all things.
Your glory is forever within our reach.
Amen

Dear Jesus, as You led the Three Kings to You by the light of a star, please draw us ever closer to You by the light of Faith. Help us to desire You as ardently as they did. Give us the grace to overcome all the obstacles that keep us far from You. May we, like them, have something to give You when we appear before You.
Amen.

Epiphany Pastoral Prayer

Father, 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, into your presence, where we may see your glory face to face. Today give us a glimpse of how truly wonderful, loving and accepting you are. Help us to enjoy you now, tomorrow and each day. As we remember the wise men seeking out your Son and publicly declaring to the world that He was your son, give us the freedom to do the same. Give us the courage to adequately praise you and declare to those around us that we are yours.

We pray all of these things through the strong name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Social justice

May this holy season be for each of us
A time of moving beyond what is "reasonable"
And toward the star of wonder;
Moving beyond grasping tight to what we have
To unclenching our hands and letting go,
Following the Light where it leads;
Moving beyond competition toward cooperation,
Seeing that all humans are sisters and brothers.
Moving beyond the anxiety of small concerns
Towards the joys of justice and peace.

May the transforming acceptance of Mary and Joseph,
The imagination of the shepherds,
And the persistence of the wise men
Guide us as we seek the Truth,
Always moving toward the Divine promise.
Always aware God can be hidden in the frailest among us,
Always open to the unexpected flash of Grace,
To the showing forth of that Love that embraces us all.

Commitment

God, our Father, you can make all things new.

We commit ourselves to you: help us

- to live for others since your love includes all people,
 - to seek those truths which we have not yet seen,
 - to obey your commands which we have heard but not yet obeyed,
 - to trust each other in the fellowship which you have given us;
- and may we be renewed, by your spirit through Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Lord.

-Uppsala prayer: World Council of Churches.

Father, we thank you for revealing yourself to us in Jesus the Christ, we who once were not your people but whom you chose to adopt as your people. As ancient Israel confessed long ago, we realize that it was not because of our own righteousness, or our own superior wisdom, or strength, or power, or numbers. It was simply because you loved us, and chose to show us that love in Jesus.

As you have accepted us when we did not deserve your love, will you help us to accept those whom we find it hard to love? Forgive us, O Lord, for any attitude that we harbor that on any level sees ourselves as better or more righteous than others. Will you help us to remove the barriers of prejudice and to tear down the walls of bigotry, religious or social? O Lord, help us realize that the walls that we erect for others only form our own prisons!

Will you fill us so full of your love that there is no more room for intolerance. As you have forgiven us much, will you enable us with your strength to forgive others even more? Will you enable us through your abiding Presence among us, communally and individually, to live our lives in a manner worthy of the Name we bear?

May we, through your guidance and our faithful obedience, find new avenues in ways that we have not imagined of holding the Light of your love so that it may be a Light of revelation for all people.

We thank you for your love, praise you for your Gift, ask for your continued Presence with us, and bring these petitions in the name of your Son, who has truly revealed your heart.
Amen.

Responsive

O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:
The Magi who study the heavens follow a guiding star!

**O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:**
The peoples who live in the shadows see a glorious light!

**O come, let us worship the Lord
and consider what wondrous things God has done:**
The Christ who embodies the Word unveils the hidden plan,
making us joint heirs of the promise of salvation through the gospel!

**O come, let us worship the Lord,
for God has done wondrous things!**
~from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Christ, born in a stable,
Give courage to all who are homeless.

Christ, who fled into Egypt,
Give comfort to all refugees.

Christ, who fasted in the desert,
Give relief to all who are hungry.

Christ, who hung in torment on the cross,
Give strength to all who suffer.

Christ, who died to save us,
**Give us the assurance of your forgiveness.
Save us today,
And use us in your loving purposes,
For your glory's sake. Amen.**

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as the Light of the World:
Lord, lead us from darkness to light.

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as a light to the nations
Lord, help us to reflect the light of your love.

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as the true light from heaven:
Lord, may we always live in the light of your holiness.

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as the light that overcomes darkness:
Lord, guide us and shine your light on our daily path.

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as the eternal light of our life:

**Lord, we are your children of light, aglow and ever praising you, our Son of
Righteousness for ever. Amen.**

EPIPHANY BENEDICTIONS

Go in peace

- and may the Spirit of God which filled John and Jesus,
- fill your hearts, souls and minds;
- may the power of God which upheld them, strengthen you for each day;
- and may the love of God which directed their every action be your guiding light and your shining star, both now and forevermore. **Amen**

God called you out of darkness,
into His wonderful light.
May you experience His kindness and blessings,
and be strong in faith, in hope, and in love.
Amen!

Because you are followers of Christ,
who appeared on this day as a light shining in darkness
may He make you a light to all your sisters and brothers.

Amen!

The wise men followed the star,
and found Christ who is light from light.
May you too find the Lord
when your pilgrimage has ended.

Amen!

May almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit.

Amen!

May you be blessed in your times of joy and success,
May you be blessed in your times of dreaming and striving,
May you be blessed in your times of sadness and failure.
And may you feel the strength, love and support
of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
surrounding you and sustaining you
wherever you may go. **Amen.**

As the wise men were led by the light of a star,
so may you be led by the light of the gospel,
and through your own lives
pass on the light of Christ to others.

And may the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and all those whom you love,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and all those whom you love,
today and in the days to come. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - SEQUENCES FOR EPIPHANY

In 2011 there are only 4 Sundays after Epiphany. The materials in this section have been organised under each Sunday, with different styles of prayer in the sequences included for the Sundays following Epiphany.

SEQUENCE 1

1st SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY - BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Thematic

God of grace and glory,
you call us with your voice of flame
to be your people, faithful and courageous.
As your beloved Son
embraced his mission in the waters of baptism,
inspire us with the fire of your Spirit
to join in his transforming work.
We ask this in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Intercessory

Sisters and brothers,
our baptismal vows call us to compassion and mercy
on behalf of those in need.
We offer our prayers for the church and the world.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Lord God,
you revealed your Son in the waters of the Jordan
and anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit
to proclaim good news to all people.
Sanctify us by the same Spirit,
that we may proclaim the healing power of the gospel
by acts of love in your name. Amen.

Scripture

Creator God, our soul's delight,
your voice thunders over the waters,
liberating the future from the past.
In the Spirit's power and the waters of rebirth,
Jesus was declared your blessed and beloved Son;
may we recall our baptism,
and be disciples of the Anointed One. Amen.

2nd SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Thematic

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

OR

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

Intercessory

To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Savior.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,

Speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

Scripture

Steadfast God,
you have enriched and enlightened us
by the revelation of your eternal Christ.
Comfort us in our mortality
and strengthen us
to walk the path of your desire,
so that by word and deed we may manifest
the gracious news of your faithfulness and love. Amen.

3rd SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Thematic

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

Or

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

Intercessory

To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Savior.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

Scripture

God of Blazing light,
through the power of the cross you shattered our darkness,
scattering the fears that bind us
and setting us free to live as your children.
Give us courage and conviction
that we may joyfully turn and follow you
into new adventures of faithful service,
led by the light that shines
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

4th SUNDAY SFTER THE EPIPHANY

Thematic

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

Or

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,

we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

Intercessory

To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.

Prayers of the People, concluding with:

Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Savior.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

Scripture

God our deliverer,
you walk with the meek and the poor,
the compassionate and those who mourn,
and you call us to walk humbly with you.
When we are foolish, be our wisdom;
when we are weak, be our strength;
that, as we learn to do justice
and to love mercy,
your rule may come as blessing. Amen.

SEQUENCE 2

1st SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY : THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Presider or deacon

As we celebrate the baptism of Christ, let us offer prayers to God who gives light to the nations and freedom to prisoners.

Deacon or other leader

By the baptism of the Son of God in the river Jordan.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N,N,...* our catechumen(s) and for their families and sponsors.

Lord, have mercy.

For all who seek Christ, and for the conversion of the whole human race.

Lord, have mercy.

For mercy, peace, and justice throughout the world

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, the hungry and the oppressed, and those in prison.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying.

Lord, have mercy.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Lord of the living and the dead, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast and allow us to eat and drink at the table of your Son; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

2ND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Presider or deacon

God calls on us to follow Christ. Let us earnestly call on God to hear our prayers for the needs, concerns, and hopes of all peoples.

Deacon or other leader

For the church of Jesus Christ in every place.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy gathering and for all who are called to follow Jesus.

Lord, have mercy.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for those in the armed forces who guard the peace.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying.

Lord, have mercy.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Lover of humankind, giver of every spiritual gift, hear the prayers of your people and give us the will and the courage to serve you throughout the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

3RD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Presider or deacon

As we follow the cross of Christ, let us pray to God who brings light into the darkness of the world.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy gathering and for all who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for our community.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

Lord, have mercy.

For the dying and the dead, and for those who care for them.

Lord, have mercy.

For ourselves, our families and friends, and all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of dawning light, hear our fervent prayers today and give us the strength to put aside all cares and follow you in your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

4th SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Presider or deacon

God chooses the weak to shame the strong. Let us pray for all those who in their weakness need justice and kindness.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world.

Lord, have mercy.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy gathering and for all who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

Lord, have mercy.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for our community.

Lord, have mercy.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

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Lord, have mercy.

For the dying, and for those who care for them.

Lord, have mercy.

For ourselves, our families, friends, and companions on the way, and all those we love.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Lord, who teaches us to walk humbly with our God, hear our fervent prayers and lead all the peoples of the world to your holy mountain; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SEQUENCE 3

1st SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

For all bishops, deaconesses and pastors, that as a community of disciples, they might bring light to the nations. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For the world, that the light of Christ might dispel slander and wickedness, bringing new life to broken relationships. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For the baptized everywhere, that through word and action we might proclaim the one who welcomes the rejected and despised. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For politicians, doctors, pastors, lawyers and all who have been entrusted with society's respect, that they might walk humbly before their creator. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all in need of forgiveness, that reconciliation might be granted to them.

Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all who have gathered here, that we might together discover the risen Christ, serving each other with joyous hearts. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all who today receive God's grace in baptism, especially _____, that the oil of anointing might remind them to offer their bodies continually as living sacrifices. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For ourselves, that we might discern the Holy Spirit in those who are newly baptized and welcome the renewal they offer, so that the church might be torn down where it is in error, and built up where it proclaims good news. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

God of New Life, in baptism you have claimed us as your own. Fill us now with your Holy Spirit that we might proclaim your steadfast love to the world. **Amen.**

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2nd SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

With prophetic vision John gave witness to Jesus Christ. That we might welcome God's reign with the same urgency let us pray, "Lord in your mercy," and respond, "Hear our prayer."

For the mission of the church, that we might make disciples as Jesus did: by inviting strangers into community; by learning together the ways of repentance and forgiveness; by walking with one another from death to life through the waters of baptism. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For truth in our world, that we who are enslaved by false allegiance to wealth, country, family or religion might be set free. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For those in poverty, that they might know abundance. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

For the baptized everywhere, that through word and action we might proclaim the one who welcomes the rejected and despised. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For politicians, doctors, pastors, lawyers and all who have been entrusted with society's respect, that they might walk humbly before their creator. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all in need of forgiveness, that reconciliation might be granted to them. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all who have gathered here, that we might together discover the risen Christ, serving each other with joyous hearts. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For all who today receive God's grace in baptism, especially_____. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

For ourselves, that we might discern the Holy Spirit in those who are newly baptized and welcome the renewal they offer, so that the church might be torn down where it is in error, and built up where it proclaims good news. Good and faithful God,

Hear our prayer

God of New Life, in baptism you have claimed us as your own. Fill us now with your Holy Spirit that we might proclaim your steadfast love to the world. **Amen.**

Third Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

That the kingdom of God might come near, let us pray, "Lord have mercy."

That all the world might join in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us pray,
Lord have mercy

That domination might yield to compassion among human beings. Let us pray,
Lord have mercy

That families haunted by violence might find courage to cry for help. Let us pray,
Lord have mercy

That our parish might listen to the needs of the poor and respond with integrity and compassion. Let us pray,
Lord have mercy

That those preparing for baptism at Easter might die to sin and so have new life. Let us pray
Lord have mercy

For mothers and fathers, that their gentleness and patience might be renewed. Let us pray, saying:
Lord have mercy

We give thanks to you, O Christ, that your reign has been made known even among us, the least of your servants. **Amen.**

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, Year A

As we offer our petitions before God, let us hunger and thirst for righteousness, saying, "In faith we pray," and respond, "Lord hear us."

For the poor and the poor in spirit that they might know what it means to be filled. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

For Prime Minister _____ and the leaders of this country, that they might serve with humility and meekness. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

For those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, especially prisoners of conscience in _____, _____ and Zimbabwe, that they might be freed. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

For those who make peace in our parish, that they might rejoice in their work. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

For those preparing for baptism and confirmation, that their commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ might not waver, even as people revile them, persecute them, and utter all kinds of evil against them falsely. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

For those who mourn the loss of family or friends, that they might discover Christ's gentle presence in their midst. In faith we pray,
Lord hear us

God of Mercy, you cause your children to hunger for righteousness. Help us to enact our prayers as we leave this place of worship. For the sake of Jesus Christ. Lord hear us. **Amen.**

EPIPHANY CHILDREN'S SERVICE

The coming of the Wise Men

Background

Epiphany or Twelfth Night is usually seen nowadays as the day when Christmas decorations are taken down, but for Christians it is a very ancient festival. From the Fourth Century, it ranked with Easter and Pentecost as one of the three principal festivals of the Church.

The Wise Men are often thought of as Chaldean or Babylonian astrologers, but the word Magi, in St. Matthew's Gospel, is actually a Persian word and there is a tradition that they were buried in the city of Saveh, near modern Teheran; Marco Polo said he visited their tomb in 1272. He also mentioned the tradition, preserved by the Eastern churches, that the gift of myrrh denoted a healer.

Preparation

This is a suitable Sunday School activity and is most effective done with simple costumes. Each Wise Man needs at least one attendant who carries the gift on a tray or cushion and if possible others as well. The attendants cheaply, by making tabards out of crepe paper or cloth, each attendant or retinue wearing a different colour which matches the clothing of the Wise Man. A banner in the appropriate colour can also be carried. The words can be learnt by the children or else read by an adult. Place the crib with figures of Mary, Joseph and Jesus at the front.

Welcome

The Wise Men journeyed for many miles,
leaving behind all they held dear
and facing unknown dangers and hardships,
in faith that their journey would lead to a revelation,
and the opportunity to bestow their gifts
on one called to great things.
We too, as Christians,
are called to take a journey
and face unknown dangers.
We pray we too may have faith
that in our journeying
we will draw closer
to the revelation of God
in our Lord Jesus Christ,
and may offer our gifts
to be used in his service.

Hymn Brightest and best of the sons of the morning

First Reading Isaiah 60: 1 - 3

Hymn First verse only of:

As with gladness men of old
or We three kings from Orient are
or In the bleak midwinter
or other hymn with five verses

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Second reading Matthew 2: 1 - 12

Hymn *Second verse of hymn*

While this is sung, the First Wise Man comes to the front with attendant(s).

A crown or gold-coloured ornament is held up so everyone can see it, and then placed in or near the crib.

O Lord Jesus, we offer you our gifts and talents
the things we are good at,
the ways in which we can help others,
our joy and our laughter.
Help us to praise you in our sunlit days,
and every day to follow you,
the one who drew children to you. **Amen.**

Hymn *Third verse of the hymn*

While this is sung, the Second Wise Man comes to the front with attendant(s).

A scented candle or some incense is lit and held up so everyone can see it, then placed in or near the crib.

O Lord Jesus, we offer you our hopes and dreams,
what we are and what we'd like to be.
Make us aware of your presence in our lives
and fill us with your grace
as the scent of this candle [incense] fills this holy place. **Amen.**

Hymn *Fourth verse of hymn is sung*

While this is sung, the Third Wise Man comes to the front with attendant(s)

*A suitable box or container is held up so everyone can see it,
then placed in or near the crib*

O Lord Jesus, we offer you our hurts and failures,
our tears and sadnesses,
the things we do wrong
and the things we can't do right.
Help us and heal us
as you have healed so many
in your life on earth and thereafter. **Amen.**

Hymn *Fifth verse of hymn is sung.*

All the Wise Men and their attendants stand round the crib.

*The leader goes to the front with a lighted candle
and says the following prayer:*

O Lord Jesus, we meet you here at the crib,
we marvel at your being born in weakness,
as we also have been born,
Give us the strength and the love
to follow you through all the seasons
of your earthly life,
that we may come at last
to the heavenly kingdom,

where all will be made perfect,
and we shall know as we are known. **Amen.**

Final hymn Earth has many a noble city
The leader walks with the candle to the doorway, followed by the Wise Men and their attendants and gives this blessing

Blessing

May you be blessed in your times of joy and success,
May you be blessed in your times of dreaming and striving,
May you be blessed in your times of sadness and failure.
And may you feel the strength, love and support
of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
surrounding you and sustaining you
wherever you may go. **Amen.**

OR

As the wise men were led by the light of a star,
so may you be led by the light of the gospel,
and through your own lives
pass on the light of Christ to others.
And may the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you and all those whom you love,
today and in the days to come. **Amen.**

EPIPHANY - ASSEMBLIES

ASSEMBLY 1

The leader may begin:

The new year, like a new born child, is placed in our hands as the old year passes away. The days and weeks to come are God's gift; they carry God's blessing. As a blessing we welcome them. Our hope for the year ending is that all that was good in it remain with us and all that was harmful be left behind.

Listen to a Reading from the Book of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
The earth was a vast waste,
darkness covered the deep,
and the spirit of God
hovered over the surface of the water.
God said: "Let there be light,"
and there was light;
and God saw the light was good,
and he separated the light from darkness.
He called the light day,
and the darkness night.
So evening came, and morning came;
it was the first day.
Genesis 1:1-5

Then all pray:

Bless us, O Lord, and bless the time and seasons
yet to come.
Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
And fill this new year with your kindness,
that we may be glad and rejoice
all the days of our life. **Amen**

ASSEMBLY 2

As the class gathers around the manger, the leader may begin:

On this day we remember the Magi who, guided by the star shining in the heavens, came to the house where Jesus rested in the arms of Mary his mother. They were blessed as they brought their gifts to that holy place. Today we ask Christ our Lord to bless our school and make it his dwelling.

Listen to the Holy Gospel according to John:

In the beginning the Word already was.

The Word was in God's presence,
and what God was, the Word was.
He was with God in the beginning,
with him no created thing came into being.
So the Word became flesh;
he made his home among us,
and we saw his glory,
such glory as befits the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.
John 1:1-3,14

Intercessions by class members for various needs have been prepared and are made.

Then all say the following prayer:

O God,
by your heavenly star,
you guided those who were wise
to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.
May your blessing come to rest on our school and all of us.
Make our lives wise with your wisdom,
true to your teaching,
and enlivened by your love.
May your Word made flesh
make his home among us. Amen.

ASSEMBLY 3 - IONA STYLE

An act of worship from the Iona Community which is suitable for Epiphany and for other times.

The Iona Community in Scotland has, for many years, developed simple forms of prayer for use in small groups. What follows is a simple act of worship that could be used regularly in a class or tutor group.

Three candles or nightlights are needed, and these should be placed on a table where everyone can easily see them, perhaps with some flowers, a cross, or a natural object.

Ist leader:

I will light a light
In the name of the Maker
Who lit the world
And breathed the breath of life for me.
A candle is lit and placed centrally.

2nd leader will light a light:

In the name of the Son
Who saved the world
And stretched out his hand for me.
A candle is lit and placed centrally.

3rd leader will light a light:

In the name of the Spirit
Who encircles the world
And blesses my soul with longing.
A candle is lit and placed centrally.

All

We will light three lights
For the Trinity of love
God above us
God beside us
God beneath us
The beginning
The end
The everlasting one.

A moment of silence is kept.

EPIPHANY - THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

This could be included in the parish magazine, or in publicity for the services or special activities to mark Epiphany.

On the 1st day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

A Partridge in a Pear Tree

The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, whose birthday we celebrate on December 25, the first day of Christmas. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge that feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, recalling the expression of Christ's sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered you under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but you would not have it so" (Luke 13:34)

On the 2nd day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Two Turtle Doves

The Old and New Testaments, which together bear witness to God's self-revelation in history and the creation of a people to tell the Story of God to the world.
On the 3rd day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

On the 3rd day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Three French Hens

The Three Theological Virtues: 1) Faith, 2) Hope, and 3) Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)
On the 4th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

On the 4th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Four Calling Birds

The Four Gospels: 1) Matthew, 2) Mark, 3) Luke, and 4) John, which proclaim the Good News of God's reconciliation of the world to Himself in Jesus Christ.
On the 5th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

On the 5th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Five Gold Rings

The first Five Books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah or the Pentateuch: 1) Genesis, 2) Exodus, 3) Leviticus, 4) Numbers, and 5) Deuteronomy, which gives the history of humanity's sinful failure and God's response of grace in the creation of a people to be a light to the world.

On the 6th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Six Geese A-laying

The six days of creation that confesses God as Creator and Sustainer of the world (Genesis 1).

On the 7th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Seven Swans A-swimming

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The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: 1) prophecy, 2) ministry, 3) teaching, 4) exhortation, 5) giving, 6) leading, and 7) compassion (Romans 12:6-8; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-11)

On the 8th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Eight Maids A-milking

The eight Beatitudes: 1) Blessed are the poor in spirit, 2) those who mourn, 3) the meek, 4) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, 5) the merciful, 6) the pure in heart, 7) the peacemakers, 8) those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. (Matthew 5:3-10)

On the 9th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Nine Ladies Dancing

The nine Fruit of the Holy Spirit: 1) love, 2) joy, 3) peace, 4) patience, 5) kindness, 6) generosity, 7) faithfulness, 8) gentleness, and 9) self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

On the 10th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Ten Lords A-leaping

The ten commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods before me; 2) Do not make an idol; 3) Do not take God's name in vain; 4) Remember the Sabbath Day; 5) Honour your father and mother; 6) Do not murder; 7) Do not commit adultery; 8) Do not steal; 9) Do not bear false witness; 10) Do not covet. (Exodus 20:1-17)

On the 11th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Eleven Pipers Piping

The eleven Faithful Apostles: 1) Simon Peter, 2) Andrew, 3) James, 4) John, 5) Philip, 6) Bartholomew, 7) Matthew, 8) Thomas, 9) James bar Alphaeus, 10) Simon the Zealot, 11) Judas bar James. (Luke 6:14-16). The list does not include the twelfth disciple, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders and the Romans.

On the 12th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Twelve Drummers Drumming

The twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles' Creed: 1) I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. 2) I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. 3) He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. 4) He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell [the grave]. 5) On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. 6) He will come again to judge the living and the dead. 7) I believe in the Holy Spirit, 8) the holy catholic Church, 9) the communion of saints, 10) the forgiveness of sins, 11) the resurrection of the body, 12) and life everlasting.

WEB BASED SERMON SOURCES

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Westminster Abbey - by the Dean, Very Rev John Hall

“All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall do him service.” [Psalm 72: 11]

<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/worship/sermons/2010/january/sermon-given-at-the-epiphany-sung-eucharist-wednesday-6-january-2010>

Homilies by Mail.com

One of the authors Bass Mitchell is a Lutheran who links Epiphany with parish Bible study in the first sermon at:

<http://www.homiliesbyemail.com/Special/Epiphany/sermon1.html>

From Bideford

A blog spot by a Methodist local preacher. Quotes from various writers - this preacher has done his homework!

<http://sermonsyc.blogspot.com/2006/12/best-and-worst-sermon-for-epiphany.html>

The Bishop of Beverley

A good example of a short sermon.

<http://www.bishopofbeverley.co.uk/Sermon2.htm>

St. John's, Edinburgh

If you want to lead with Dr No and Harry Potter here you have it. An excellent example of a telling short sermon dealing with the account in Matthew's gospel.

<http://www.stjohns-edinburgh.org.uk/sermons/johnarnes020106.shtml>

St Mark's Church wherever

Brings together Matthew's account with insights from Isaiah.

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<http://www.stmarkschurch.me.uk/resources/sermons/files/20080106.pdf>

St Michael with incense wafting

And if you want one which will have incense wafting around you as you read it... look no farther!

<http://www.st-michaels.org.uk/sermons%202004/Epiphany%201.pdf>

However, if

You prefer lots of Biblical passages in a sermon, this one on Isaiah and the theme "Your light has come" , may fit your criteria.

<http://chuckwarnockblog.wordpress.com/2009/01/03/sermon-your-light-has-come/>

Fancy a Mancunian accent?

http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk/sermons/sermon_04jan09.htm

Traditional homily style

<http://www.homily-service.net/ye2005/aepilord.htm>

One with a Swansea accent

<http://www.saintbarnabaschurch.org.uk/sermon060108.htm>

For children

http://www.christiancrafters.com/lesson_Epiphany.html

EPIPHANY 2

On Amazing Grace

<http://www.free-sermons.org/sermons/Amazing-Grace-13305>

On **John the Baptist's** recognition of Jesus as The Lamb of God

http://www.stlukes.net/Recent_Sermons/pdf/year-a/Epiphany_02_A_2008.pdf

EPIPHANY 3 - Year A

Light from the margins - MATTHEW 4: 12-23

<http://sermonsyra.blogspot.com/2008/01/epiphany-3-light-from-margins.html>

EPIPHANY 4 - Year A

Sermons That Work - The Episcopal Church site

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_7682_ENG_HTM.htm

Also:

http://www.sermons.org/sermons/new_testament/matthew/matthew_4_1-11.htm

http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Dono/Matt/05.01-12_HappyWhen.htm

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

If you have adjacent rooms connected by a doorway you may want to try an experiment. Have the lights on brightly in one room. Have the door closed to the adjacent room where there is total darkness. Now open the door. What happens? Does the darkness sneak into the lighted room? Not at all. The reverse is true as the light travels into the dark room and the lighted room loses none of its brightness. Life is also that way. At Christmas, Epiphany, the Light came. Lift Jesus up. Let the light shine through you.

Illustration 2

The Quakers had a slogan which is a good one: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." God did just that when he sent his Son, Jesus, to be the light of the world. God could have condemned the world but he chose rather to save the world. It is sometimes easier to get people to march in a crusade against something than to get them to stand up for something good. We are more prone to complain than we are to commend.

Illustration 3

In the Bucharest subway, children leading lambs walk through the trains in commemoration of the Lamb of God to whom John pointed. Orthodox Christians traditionally have their homes blessed with holy water on or around this day.

Illustration 4

Nowhere is Epiphany celebrated more joyously than in Ethiopia. Pilgrims from all over the country converge on the ancient city of Aksum, where they bathe in a great reservoir whose waters have been blessed by a priest.

Illustration 5

I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

A young woman, attending church with a friend, felt that the minister was a person she could trust and who could help her with her marital problems. She called for an appointment and, during 2 hours one afternoon, it became clear that money, family, religion and sex were four things that had been distorted or neglected in her marriage.

"Why did you come to me--a stranger?" the minister asked, as the young woman was preparing to leave.

"Because you represent a force in life that I have neglected for years. I had problems in high school, but could cope with them because of my close association with the church and with God. I have neglected that strength over the past 12 years. If only I had held tightly to it, I would be able to cope better--would be better. That's why I am here. That woman started building her life again on the foundation of Christ.

SERMON STARTERS

1

In the stories of Jesus' birth, two special groups of people came to visit the new-born babe: the shepherds and the magi. The church has no special feast to commemorate the visit of the shepherds but we have this special feast of Epiphany today to celebrate the visit of the magi. Why is that? It is because the visit of the magi is an eye-opener. The shepherds learnt of the birth of Jesus through a direct revelation from angels appearing in the midnight sky. This is direct and supernatural revelation. Many of us have no problem with that. The magi, on the other hand, learnt of the birth of Jesus by observing a star. The star did not say anything to them. They had to interpret this natural sign of the star to know what it meant and where it led. If we remember that the magi or the three wise men were nature worshippers, people who divined God's will by reading the movements of the stars and other heavenly bodies, then we can see how the visit of the magi challenges some of our popular beliefs.

Religious people of all persuasions tend to think that their religious tradition is the only way to God. This is what some of us hear when we hear such words of Jesus as: **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6). We hastily conclude that the way of God equals the way of our religious tradition. Yet the word of God cautions us against such a narrow interpretation. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord"** (Isaiah 55:8). That is why we are fascinated with the story of the visit of the magi. It is a unique story that opens our eyes to the fact that God is not limited to any one religious tradition. Notice how people of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God was born. The shepherds who were regarded as unclean and could not take part in Temple worship without undergoing purification came to know through a direct vision of angels. The magi knew through a reading of the stars. And King Herod's scribes came to know through searching the scriptures. Visions, stars, scriptures -- different ways of arriving at the same truth. Of course this does not mean that any religious tradition is just as good as the other. Notice how Matthew indicates that when the guiding star got to Jerusalem its light failed and the magi had to consult the scriptures to direct them to Bethlehem. Over and above the natural light of the star the magi still needed the supernatural light of scripture to finally get to Jesus.

2

The Jewish people were expecting the Messiah for thousands of years. However, my coming into the world was a humble event very obscure to them, but for the light given off by a star.

I am the light of the world that came to give light to those in darkness. The people who had the light of God through the Holy Scriptures were living in darkness just as the rest of the world.

Only the humble servants of God and a few shepherds received the knowledge of my coming and participated in the coming of the great light that would overcome darkness.

In the same way three very special humble men were chosen from different cultures to perceive in wisdom the great event that was taking place, the coming of the Saviour of the world.

Just as the rain comes for the good and the bad, and the sun shines to virtuous and sinners alike, I have come for everyone. Every human being has been made in the image of God, but sin has destroyed that image. I am the Lord who forgives sins and restores the image of God in every person.

The enemy has always been around trying to destroy the work of God, Herod was preparing to destroy the New King, but the plan of God has always been superior to the plan of the wicked.

The three wise men represent all the peoples of the world, who live in darkness and need my light to survive spiritually. I accepted the homage of these three humble men who went out of their ways to give glory to God by accepting the coming of His Son into the world.

The offering of the incense represents faith in me, Jesus, the Son of the Living God. This is the greatest gift any one can offer me. This I accept through your prayers and your acceptance of my Word and the Church I left to represent me.

The offering of myrrh represents the suffering that I endured and the sufferings that all those who believe in me must suffer for my sake. It is the cross, which is given to everyone of my followers and requires the acceptance of the Will of God.

The offering of gold represents the treasure of praise, adoration, honour and thanksgiving offered to me, your Lord, God and Saviour. It is the gift that I receive from every soul who appreciates that I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.

POETRY

The Adoration of the Wise Men

Saw you never in the twilight,
When the sun had left the skies,
p in heaven the clear stars shining,
hrough the gloom like silver eyes?
o of old the wise men watching,
aw a little stranger star,
nd they knew the King was given,
nd they follow'd it from far.

Heard you never of the story,
How they cross'd the desert wild,
ourney'd on by plain and mountain,
ill they found the Holy Child?
ow they open'd all their treasure,
neeling to that Infant King,
ave the gold and fragrant incense,
ave the myrrh in offering?

Know ye not that lowly Baby
Was the bright and morning star,
e who came to light the Gentiles,
nd the darken'd isles afar?
nd we too may seek his cradle,
here our heart's best treasures bring,
ove, and Faith, and true devotion,
or our Saviour, God, and King.
- by Cecil Frances Alexander

Journey of the Magi

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times when we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities dirty and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
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With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wineskins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.
- by T.S. Eliot