

Sunday 7th January 2024 @10am

Epiphany/Baptism of Christ

Kogarah Uniting Church

We Gather in the Foyer

Chalking the Door

EPIPHANY CHALK BLESSING

Person 1: (
Deok Hee)

Since the Middle Ages there has been a tradition that on (or near) the feast of the Epiphany we pray for God's blessing on our homes and churches, marking the entrance with chalk (an incarnational image reminding us of the dust of the earth from which we were made). We mark the main door of our church or home with the initials of the Magi and the numerals of the new year, connected with crosses:

20 + C + M + B + 24

The initials remind us of the legendary names of the Magi:
Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

They also stand for the Latin motto:

Christus mansionem benedicat,
"May Christ bless this house."

Person 2: (Robert)

Marking the doorway to home or church is rooted in the Old Testament. Holy Scripture reminds us that God has at times commanded his people to mark their doors. The Israelites marked their doors with the lamb's blood on the night of the passover (Exodus 12:7).

Person 3: (Robyn)

A similar command was given with the Shema:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart ... and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 9)

Person 4: (Richard)

In this ritual today, we mark our doors with chalk as a sign that we have invited God's

presence and blessing into our home and church. It is an invitation for Jesus to be a daily guest with us, our comings and goings, our conversations, our work and play, our joys and sorrows.

Person 1 Our help is in the name of the Lord:

Congregation *The maker of heaven and earth.*

Person 1 The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in:

Congregation: *From this time forth for evermore.*

Person 2 holds chalk and prays:

Loving God, bless this texta, that it may be helpful to your people; and grant that through the invocation of your most Holy Name all who use it in faith to write upon the their doors the names of your saints, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, may receive peace and comfort for all who dwell in or visit our homes or church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Person 4 marks lintel or doorstep (Richard)

while Person 3 says:

The three Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar followed the star of God's Son two thousand and twenty years ago. May Christ bless our home and church and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.

All Pray:

Visit, O God, this church with the gladness of your presence. Bless all who live or visit here with the gift of your love; and grant that we may manifest your love to each other and to all whose lives we touch. May we grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of you; guide, comfort, and strengthen us in peace, O Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

Person 1: (Deok Hee)

“Chalking the door” is a way to celebrate and physically mark the occasion of the Epiphany and God’s blessing of our lives and home. With time the texta will fade. It is a reminder to let the meaning of the written symbols sink into the depths of our heart and be lived out in our words and actions.

Person 2 (Robert)

We move not the sanctuary singing We Three Kings

Sing: We three kings (We progress into the church)

We three kings of Orient are;

bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star:

*Oh! Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Born a king on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown him again,
king forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign:

*Oh! Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Frankincense to offer have I,
incense owns a deity nigh,
prayer and praising, all of us raising,
worship him, God Most High:

*Oh! Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb:

Oh! Star of wonder, star of night,

*star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

Glorious now, behold him arise,
King, and God, and sacrifice;
Alleluia, Alleluia ,
earth to the heavens replies:
*Oh! Star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.*

© PD; 1857 John Henry Hopkins Reproduced under Copyright Licences:
ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Acknowledgement of Country

• We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders, past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora nation who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move, was and always will be Aboriginal Land.

Lighting the Christ Candle

We light the Christ candle to acknowledge God's presence with us.

- God is here!
- *God is always here!*
- God is with us!
- *God is always with us!*

Saying who we are

We are a congregation and a community who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles;

**we create a safe place for the community, and
share the journey of life and faith.**

Call to Worship

Let us hear the words of the psalmist who says:

Ascribe to God, O heavenly
beings, ascribe to God glory and
strength. Ascribe to God the glory
of God's name;
worship God in holy splendor.

(Psalm 29:1–2)

As we gather,
may we remember the glorious things that God
has done, is doing and will do in the days and
years to come.

Sing: *Star Child* Shirley Murray

**Star-Child, earth-Child, go-between of God,
love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod,
*This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!***

**Street child, beat child, no place left to go,
hurt child, used child, no one wants to know,
*This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!***

**Grown child, old child, memory full of years,
sad child, lost child, story told in tears,
*This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!***

**Spared child, spoiled child, having, wanting more,
wise child, faith child, knowing joy in store,
*This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!***

**Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign,
down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine,
*This year, this year, let the day arrive
when Christmas comes for everyone,
everyone alive!***

**© 1992, Shirley Erena Murray Reproduced under Copyright Licences:
ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150**

Opening Prayer

Creator God,
Thank you for bringing us safely together.
Speak to us clearly as we listen for your voice in song, word, and prayer.
May we uplift one another in joy and peace and share your love in this time of
worship and in the time beyond.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

We come to God wanting forgiveness and renewal.

Let us pray.

God our Creator and Saviour, we are creatures who need your constant assistance.

**Without it we will never completely break free from those forces, sometimes subtle
and sometimes blatant, that compromise our spirit, and make an unholy alliance with
the evil in the world around us. Our need is not for a quick fix, with cheap forgiveness
followed by pious but impractical good intentions. Rather we pray for an ongoing
radical transformation within our deepest being.**

**We ask for more and more of your saving grace. For the ability to discern our own
secretive sins and to muster the desire to sincerely repent. We need a mercy that
reaches into those depths where spiritual hungers and furtive corruptions coexist. We
want you to forgive our self treachery, to eradicate any mutiny, and then liberate those
holy desires which long to rise up into loving thoughts and faithful deeds.**

**Please immerse us in your healing waters of your love. Baptise us with your Spirit. Let
us know that we are truly made in your image and destined for heights more beautiful**

than we can ever imagine. Through Christ Jesus, who for our sakes was baptised by water and the Spirit.

Amen

Sometimes, it takes a roar for us to listen.

Sometimes, it takes a scream for us to really see someone is hurting.

Sometimes, we do not choose to listen because it does not fit our agenda.

Forgive us, O God

Words of Grace

Today, may our ears be open to listening to others. Today, may our ears be open to listening to ourselves.

Today and every day, may our ears be open to the words of God. Amen.

Passing the Peace of Christ

ENGAGING THE WORD

A Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 1:1–5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Sing: • TiS 187 *Let all creation dance* (Brian Wren)

**Let all creation dance
in energies sublime,**

as order turns with chance,
unfolding space and time,
for nature's art
in glory grows,
and newly shows God's mind and heart.

God's breath each force unfurls,
igniting from a spark
expanding starry swirls,
with whirlpools dense and dark.
Though moon and sun
seem mindless things,
each orbit sings: "Your will be done."

Our own amazing earth,
with sunlight, cloud and storms
and life's abundant growth
in lovely shapes and forms,
is made for praise,
a fragile whole,
and from its soul heaven's music plays.

Lift heart and soul and voice:
in Christ all praises meet
and nature shall rejoice
as all is made complete.
In hope be strong,
all life befriend
and kindly tend creation's song.

© Hope Publishing; words, Brian Arthur Wren Reproduced under Copyright
Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Readings from the Christian Scriptures

Mark 1:4–11 (Baptism of Christ)

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more

powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Matthew 2:1-1 (Epiphany)

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “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.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶‘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.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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.”

⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Sing: • *Now the star of Christmas* (Shirley Murray)

**Now the star of Christmas
shines into our day,
points a new direction:
change is on the way -
there's another landscape
to be travelled through,
there's a new-born spirit**

broadening our view.

**When the Christ of Christmas
speaks to heart and mind,
clears the clouded vision
hurting humankind,
kindred spirits gather,
drawn toward the light,
sharing revelation,
joyful at the sight.**

**If we choose to follow,
we may yet be wise.
Where the three kings travel,
three great faiths arise:
Jesus Christ for Christians,
Jesus, Judah's son,
Prophet for the Muslim,
wisdom in each one.**

**Where the star enlightens,
light is shared around.
God has drawn no borders,
faith sees common ground:
Peace the hopeful journey,
justice without bar,
God's illumination
from a Christmas star.**

© SE Murray Reproduced under Copyright Licences:ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Offering

Gracious God, we thank you for all the things we have.
We humbly offer these gifts to support your work in
this place. Amen.

Reflection

Genesis 1:1-4, Matthew 2:1-12

Today is the first Sunday of the New Year 2024. We also celebrate the season of Epiphany today. The season of Epiphany is about light. It's about the coming of the true Light into the darkness of this world. In this season, what we shouldn't forget is God's love for the world. Today's Bible readings are about light. In Genesis 1:3-4, "God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.'" And Matthew chapter 2 is the story about the visit of the Wise men. They said, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

The gorgeous story of the Wise Men is among the favourites of the Christian people. It is colourful, rich, and challenging in its meaningfulness. A Christian writer weaved stories about them and even gave them spectacular names: Casper, Melchior, and Balthasar. It's all so Eastern, so Arabian, so exotic. However, those three totally strangers took part in the most dramatic and radical event in human history ever. They are still being remembered as direct witnesses to God's unspeakable love toward all humanity.

First, they were Outsiders. They didn't belong. They were not Jews. They were from a faraway land. They were different. Pete Velandar, an influential racism fighter, within the American Catholic Church, tells us his story. "I remember the day I learned to hate racism. I was six years old. The walk home from school was only about five blocks. I usually walked with some friends. On this day I walked alone. Happy, but in a hurry, I zigzagged around the corner, where I had walked into a kind-of back street beating. There were three big white kids and there was one black kid. He was standing against a garage, his hands behind his back. The three white kids were taking turns punching him. They laughed. The black kid stood silently except for the groans that followed each blow. And now, I was caught. One of the three grabbed me and stood me in front of their victim. "You take a turn," he said. "Hit him!" "Hit him or you're next." So I did. I pretended a punch. I can still feel the soft fur of that boy's blue sweater as my knuckles gently touched his stomach. I don't know how long he had to stand backed up against that garage. After my minute participation in the conspiracy, they let me go and I ran. I ran home crying and sick to my stomach. I have never forgotten. Thirty-five years later that event still preaches a sermon to me every time I remember it. I never knew his name. I wish I did. I wish I could find him. I need to ask his forgiveness – not for the blow I delivered, for it was nothing, but for the blows I refused to stand by his side and receive." The event that he experienced when he was six changed his whole life, being a life-long Christian activist against racism.

One can despise, criticize, denounce, and condemn something without ever being

willing to suffer, or even be inconvenienced, to bring about change. If there is one thing that Jesus taught us, I believe it was how to suffer, suffer with others and for others. Our Christian gospel would turn out to be meaningless without sufferings. Jesus suffered and still suffers, by taking part in others' sufferings. Jesus walked the way of the cross and the cross was all about suffering. He suffered so that we get healed. He died so that we live. At the crib of Bethlehem two thousand years ago, there was no Outsiders, no racism, no prejudice, no beatings. Jesus received them all. Ox and donkey, shepherds and Magi, poor and rich, Jews and Gentiles – He came for them all. He would reject no one, as he would accept the unique gifts of each. What a pity if his followers, including us, don't always treat Outsiders as he did. Human life is full of sufferings. You may happen to be in a suffering-proof circumstance at the moment. However, if you give a couple of steps of move beyond your place, you'll know the world around you bears so many suffering people. God never asks us to give an answer to or solve those sufferings. He only wants us to suffer with others and for others. I think it's really a part of the gospel. That's probably why Matthew included the story of wise men in his Gospel.

The wise men are not only Outsiders, they are Seekers. They travelled the desert in doubt. They were not sure. They were looking for signs, reading the stars, making inquiries. Perhaps at the end, after all, there was nothing. But they continued the journey in one other's company. I have come across an article that a female American pastor wrote in an internet soon after the September 11 tragedy occurred. It read, "I am not sure about my faith at the moment. I don't even know if God exists the way we understand in our earthly life. I don't even know if God rules or controls in the way our Christian theology describes. I am just one of the millions of uncertain Christians who desperately seek some kind of a sign from God to experience God is there and really cares". I meet lots of people like that. I meet people who say, "I'm not sure I believe everything the church teaches. I go to church but my mind wanders and I'm not into it. I have my doubts about a lot of things, about faith, about religion, about the church. Another person says, "How can I believe in a God who allows millions of babies to be born with AIDS? I'm just not sure. So much has changed. So much has happened. What am I doing here? I often feel like a hypocrite." But, friends, this is not hypocrisy. This is a journey of seeking and searching. This is the full routine of loyalty. They are trying to be faithful, faithful even when they don't get anything out of it. Such people are not hypocrites. They are searchers after truth and seekers of God. They are Magi seeking and they are Magi accepted. Matthew wants us to know that.

The Gospel of Matthew was written mainly for the Jews of first century. To tell the birth story of the Saviour whom the whole Jewish society had been waiting for so many centuries, Matthew began with the story of three wise men who came from totally

different religion, the story backed by ignorant shepherds, cow and donkey, and a Jewish outsider girl who gave birth to a baby outside human marriage. What do you see and hear? I believe this familiar story turns out to be our story. Who are the magi in your story? Who are the outsiders? Who are the shepherds in your life? Who are the doubters? Who are the wanderers? What are the different? Who are the worldly? Who are the uncertain in your family? Who are the seekers? And, God asks, "How will you suffer with them and for them? How will you accept them? How will you journey your desert? And, what gifts will you bring to serve Christ and those around you?" And, when you respond, no matter how you might, you'll see the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord happens in front of you. Amen.

Prayers for Others

Loving God, please teach us to pray for others, with our feelings and well as our minds, with our actions and well as our words.

Teach us to pray for those who believe the heavens are forever empty and devoid of any divine purpose or compassion.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for any who fear that their wrong doing has closed the heavens forever against them.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for the people who think they are too unimportant for God to notice, or their worries to trivial to mention.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for some whose loss of work, or broken marriages, or poverty and homelessness, makes them feel forsaken.

Let there be light and hope;

Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for the victims of emotional or mental illness, especially those who fear that God has completely left them.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for those in bondage to gambling addiction, alcoholism or other drugs, and who find that their religion seems unable to help.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for some who been too arrogant to believe in God, and now in desperate need are too stubborn to contemplate faith.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.

Teach us to pray for each other in this church, not thinking that some have a faith too strong to need our prayers, or others too shallow to deserve them.

Let there be light and hope;
Let there be faith, love, joy and peace.,

Loving God, please keep us close to the beloved Son, in whom you are well pleased, that through him and with him, we may celebrate the joys of an open heaven and a redeemed earth.

Through Christ Jesus our Saviour.
Amen!

Amen!

Sing: • *Wise men came journeying* (Shirley Murray)

**Wise men came journeying, once long ago,
camel hooves swirling the sand dune and snow,
gold in the saddle bag, myrrh in the jar,**

incense to honour the Child of the star.

**Wise are the travellers led to move on,
following signs where the Christ light has shone,
facing the deserts and crossing the lines,
heeding no limits that culture defines.**

**Wise are each one of us looking for change,
stargazer people, respecting the strange,
inner and outer worlds open to light,
centred on seeing the real and the right.**

**Wise ones keep journeying all through their days,
bringing their gifts to the source of their praise,
risking the Promise with all they hold dear,
seeking God's peace at the door of the year.**

© Shirley Murray Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Blessing/Benediction

THE ROAD AHEAD IS BLESSED

**The windows of heaven are open,
*whether we realise it or not.***

**The Spirit is moving like a dove
*whether we welcome her or not,***

**this is the new age of Christ
*whether we celebrate it or not.***

As we prepare to depart,
may you know the Spirit moving in the rushing of

the wind, may you know the love of God in the
flow of water,
may you know the peace of God each and every day
of your life. Amen

**Exit Song: *Mothering God you gave me birth* (Jean
Janzen) Tune: TiS 654**

**Mothering God, you gave me birth
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of every breath,
you are my wind, my rain, my sun.**

**Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of life and grape of love,
your very body for my peace.**

**Mothering Spirit, nurturing one,
in arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow
until I flower, until I know.**

**© J. Jansen Reproduced under Copyright
Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150**