

Don't forget Epiphany!

Enjoying Life Together—
Our Experience of Intergenerational Worship and Learning

Litany for Dedication

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Don't forget Epiphany!

By Tori Smit, Associate Secretary, The Vine



Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
how I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so high,
like a diamond in the sky!
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
how I wonder what you are!

Have you ever gone outside on a clear summer's night to lie down in a field and look at the stars? The heavens are filled with them, so many that you can hardly begin to count.

Let's lie down right here in the church and pretend we're lying in a field. It's dark, and there is no one else around. The sky is filled with thousands upon thousands of amazing stars - big bright stars and tiny winking ones. Blue, pink and white stars fill the night sky. As we gaze up at all the stars, we see one very special star that outshines all others - the brightest and the biggest.

This is how we begin our Epiphany service of worship. The floor at the front of the church is littered with children gazing up to the heavens of the sanctuary ceiling. The rest of the congregation leans way back in the pews to join in the storytelling of that first Epiphany. And, as the story of the magi following that amazing star is told, stars begin to appear on the ceiling of the darkened room. Feasting our eyes on the night sky, we drink in the wonder of their journey and the majesty of the Christ child who greeted them at the story's end.

Epiphany brings us a story that is too good to be forgotten, too important to be delivered weeks earlier along with the visit of the shepherds on that first Christmas night. Each and every part of the story of the birth of Jesus deserves to be told and savoured throughout the collective seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Sadly, by the time we've made it through the Advent events, parties, pageants and multiple Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, we give a quiet nod to the magi and quickly clean up the remnants of the celebrations that preceded this day.

Let's imagine how we could relive the Epiphany story, keeping in mind that we, and our congregation, are ready for quieter events that don't involve too much preparation.

For our Epiphany worship service, we planned a simple but engaging sharing of the Epiphany story. No church school classes were held that day, giving the teachers a much deserved break after their extraordinary efforts leading up to Christmas. We all gathered together in the sanctuary for worship. The Christmas trees at the front of the sanctuary had been stripped of their decorations and filled with twinkling white lights. White candles were the only other decoration. It looked a little like Christmas, but different. Something important was going to happen, but what?

Early in the worship service, the children and anyone else who wanted to join them were invited to come to the front and find a place to lie down on the floor. Robed and miked, I lay down on the floor and presented the message for the day. A few minutes into the story, I invited everyone to close their eyes and imagine a star-filled night sky. On cue, a choir member turned out all the lights and, bit by bit, the ceiling filled with the stars of the heavens. A borrowed stage light with a glass slide of the night sky cast a sea of stars over the entire ceiling and we were transported back to the night of the magi's journey. Pointing to the brightest star of all, we travelled with the magi to Bethlehem. We took all the time we needed to tell the story well. No three-minute lesson before we go off somewhere else! This was a message for everyone, to be savoured by the congregation.

Later in the service, brown lunch bags filled with gold pipe cleaners were passed down the pews. Each person was invited to make a gold star from one or two of them and place it on the tree as part of the day's offering. In bringing each star to the tree, we thought of the ways that we could bring light into the world, just

as Christ came to be our light. By the end of the service, the sanctuary was filled with shining lights welcoming the one who comes as light to us all.

A simple service is only one way to celebrate the Epiphany. Perhaps luminaries, made by the children, could line the steps and pathways leading to your church, welcoming people to visit the Christ child on Epiphany morning. Your church might plan a potluck lunch following worship on Epiphany. This would be a way to celebrate together all you have seen and heard during this season. If your congregation gathers with food and fellowship to decorate the church for Christmas, perhaps a special gathering on Epiphany Sunday with treats for everyone would bring the season to completion. Take this opportunity to reflect on each of the symbols and to retell the story as each decoration is carefully put away.

As you are planning for a Christmas tree for the sanctuary or church hall, consider buying a potted Christmas tree from a local greenhouse. Use it to decorate the church, and then take it out on Epiphany to the church garden or a nearby forest to be planted as a witness to the gift of Jesus. Or, using a cut tree, trim away most of the branches following Epiphany, leaving a bare trunk and two branches sticking out from either side. Your tree can now be draped and used as the cross during the Lent, Holy Week and Easter seasons.

As your church begins to plan for this year's Advent and Christmas seasons, remember Epiphany too. Take time to complete the message of the birth of Jesus with this story of light given to the whole world.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
wise men journey from afar,
following your shining light
to the holy babe tonight.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
now I know just what you are!

Little Star, from My First Bible Songs. Arranged by Anna Laura Page and Jean Anne Shaffeman. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.

Tori Smit is the associate secretary for The Vine with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Tori enjoys every opportunity to share the stories of our faith in vibrant and engaging ways for children, youth and adults.