

Second Sunday after Christmas Day / Epiphany, Year C (January 5, 2025) – Re-Membering the Body: They All Gather Together

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). Divide participants into pairs or groups of three. Ask, “Did you make any New Year’s resolutions? What was the most memorable New Year’s resolution, whether you kept it or not?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Isaiah 60:1-6](#) and [Matthew 2:1-12](#).

- What does Isaiah 60:1 ("Arise, shine, for your light has come") mean? How do you interpret the imagery of light in this passage? [It is a call to action and transformation. It signifies that the people of Israel should rise from a state of despair or darkness because God's presence and favor are now upon them. The "light" symbolizes God's glory, guidance, and salvation, which has arrived and is available to them.]
- Who were the wise men, and why did they come to Jerusalem? [The wise men, also known as the magi, were likely scholars or astrologers from the East, possibly Persia. They came to Jerusalem seeking the "king of the Jews" after seeing the star in the east, which they interpreted as a sign of his birth. Their journey was motivated by a desire to honor and worship this new king.]
- How did King Herod react to the news of Jesus' birth, and why? [“When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3). Herod saw the birth of a new "king of the Jews" as a threat to his rule and authority.]
- The wise men/magi traveled from afar to worship Jesus, recognizing him as the king, despite cultural and geographical differences. What does this teach us about seeking truth and unity beyond our differences? Imagine your church as a place where people from all walks of life come together, much as the wise men/magi came from different lands. What steps could you take to build an inclusive and welcoming community?
- “That is one of the things we forget to pay attention to, our need to worship. It’s not just a need but a longing, a deep longing that nothing else will fill. We are incomplete without it; we are missing something of significance. Epiphany is an opportunity to fill that void, to make us whole” (Sermon Note, January 5).
 - o As we are at the beginning of the year, what ways do you plan to worship God this year?
 - o “They All Gather Together” is the theme for today. What can you do to gather together to worship Jesus?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). Pray the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank You for Your light that has come into the world, guiding us out of darkness and into Your glorious presence. Just as the nations and the magi were drawn to Your light, may we gather together in unity and worship, celebrating our diversity. Help us create a welcoming and inclusive

community that reflects Your love for all people. Guide our actions and hearts this week as we strive to connect with others and grow in understanding. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

First Sunday after the Epiphany / Baptism of the Lord, Year C (January 12, 2025) – Re-Membering the Body: I Will Be with You

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “When were you baptized? Do you remember what it was like? If you have not been baptized, what images come to mind when you hear the word ‘baptism’?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#).

- What were the people wondering about John the Baptist in Luke 3:15? [The people were wondering if John the Baptist was the Messiah.]
- What did John say he baptized with? What did Jesus use to baptize? [“John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with **water**’; but one who is more powerful than I is coming... He will baptize you with **the Holy Spirit and fire**” (Luke 3:16. Emphasis added).]
- What significant event happened when Jesus was baptized? [When Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened, the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22).]
 - o How could you apply this message of being loved and affirmed by God in your daily lives?
- Considering the message and the example of John and Jesus, how do you discern your own calling and mission within the church and your personal lives? What criteria should you use to evaluate whether you are following God's will?
- “That’s the promise. Baptism doesn’t mean safety or security. Just ask Jesus. It means presence. It means community. That’s our gift; that’s the joy--for us and then through us to the world. That’s what we have to offer. There are no secret answers, no quick fixes, no easy steps to a better life; there is presence. ‘Best of all,’ John Wesley supposedly said on his deathbed, ‘God is with us’” (Sermon Note, January 12).
 - o What will you do this week to live out the assurance that God is with you? How can you remind yourself and others of God's constant presence and love?
 - o How might you integrate this assurance into your community and church activities? How can you embody God's presence and love in your interactions with others?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). Pray the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord’s Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank You for the powerful reminder that You are always with us. As we reflect on Jesus' baptism and the affirmation of Your love, help us embrace our identity as Your beloved children. Guide us to live out Your love in our daily lives and to support one another in our journeys. Amen.

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