

AN INTERGENERATIONAL EPIPHANY WORSHIP

By Holly Bannan

For many, the season of Advent ends on December 25th as we mark the birth of our Savior. The Holy Family, the shepherds, the angels have all made their way to Bethlehem. The special Christmas Eve services are behind us. The greenery in the sanctuaries, the Chrismon trees, the poinsettias, they all come down and we look towards a new calendar year.

Yet, the celebration is far from over. Even though we place the Magi in the nativity by Christmas, we have to remember their long journey, following the strange star that appeared in the sky. Epiphany is a day of celebration, as it marks the day that the Magi arrived to find the Christ child, bearing gifts for the newborn King. This year, with Epiphany (January 6th) falling on a Sunday, we decided to make it a special occasion. We wanted to mark the date and celebrate it as an entire church.

The book *Home by Another Way: A Christmas Story*, written by Barbara Brown Taylor and illustrated by Melanie Cataldo, was our inspiration for the service. Brown Taylor's beautifully written message of the Magi's journey to Bethlehem was captivating, and Cataldo's illustrations were absolutely breathtaking. We were given permission by the publisher to scan the book and project it on our screen so the congregation could see the images as our pastor read the story.

To bring the story to life, we had members of the congregation dress up in costume and "act out" the story. We had three men (of varying ages) play the Magi, we had youth play Mary, Joseph, and King Herod, and we had our very own live baby Jesus. Our children dressed up as Herod's guard, shepherds, and sheep. The Magi traveled around the sanctuary, talked with King Herod and his "terrified" guard, arrived to the Holy Family and gave their gifts to the King. Throughout the story, we sang a verse of *We Three Kings of Orient Are*. It was a unique way to make every member of our congregation part of the story.

At the conclusion of the story, we gave each person a "star gift." They were stars with a word to ponder throughout the year. It was the simple reminder of the gift that God has already given to us, Jesus Christ. Each star had one word like "kindness," "sharing," "openness," "laughter," "unity," and more. Thirty words were used, so some members had the same word. It was a tangible sign of God's gift and presence with us.

This service was a beautiful representation of what I hope the church can be - an intergenerational worship service, where people of all ages, race, socio-economic backgrounds, and political views, can come together and worship as one body. It was not a big production; we did not rehearse, and it wasn't perfect by any means. Baby Jesus babbled and pulled on Mary's garments, Herod's wig wouldn't sit straight, we didn't have much room for the Magi to "wander" around or bow before the baby; yet, it was beautiful. It was meaningful. It was a gift. We were all able to worship and look at the story of the Magi in a different light. It was a unique way to celebrate Epiphany, one that I will remember for a long time to come.

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