

I've Had an Epiphany
Sunday, January 2, 2022



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Celebration Service

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Lucinda Alton, RScP and Chris Johnson, RScP

Bell – Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Opening Prayer – Lucinda

Introduction –Diana

Good morning. My name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center, and I welcome you Home to our Beloved Community... and home to your own Mystic Heart. It is so good to have you here with us this morning for our first Sunday Celebration of the New Year. Would you please stand if you're able and join me in celebrating *New Beginnings*...you'll find the words on the screen.

Music – Rev. Diana & Chris

 ***Welcome to the Mystic Heart***

 ***One Big Family***

 ***Blessing to the World***

Rev. Diana

Joining our voices, whether singing or speaking, is a powerful way to synchronize our vibration...the Power of the Word is mighty, and when we use it in chorus, it gains even more Power.

This month we are *Beginning Anew*...and in this first week of 2022, *I've Had an Epiphany*, and I want to share it with you.

But first, let's take a moment to bring ourselves fully present, finding a point of stillness within by following the breath...allowing the breath to slow just a bit, and to find its own pace and flow...embracing this moment as perfect...embracing ourselves as perfect expressions of Spirit...no need to question or judge... just being present...blessed with the gift of life...just breathing...here and now...

Now, feeling our connection with all that is...with our Global Community. Together we envision a web of Consciousness, that infuses and encompasses the earth... each of us a point of Light in the web. And we sense that same Light in every human, past, present and future...acknowledging our Divine Connection...and then reaching out beyond humanity to all of Nature...every creature, shining with the Light of

Spirit...the plants and rocks, the sand, the soil, and the water, teeming with Life, radiating Intelligence...and now allowing our Light to reach into the heavens, to the clouds, the stars, and the galaxies, and sensing that all of it is radiating with the same Divine Light...

Feeling our Unity with the One Eternal and Omnipresent Life, we share a heartfelt intention for our time together. We begin anew, acknowledging our responsibility to ourselves, to one another, and to Life Itself. May we love, respect, and care for ourselves, body, mind, and spirit; may we live peacefully, treating one another with lovingkindness; and may we walk lightly on the earth, serving as stewards of our planet's many gifts.

In setting this prayerful intention, our Spiritual Work is empowered. "Where two or more are gathered, there Am I among you."

SILENCE – 1 Minute – Bell

Rev. Diana

Today is the 8th Day of Christmas...I'll bet you thought Christmas was done. Nope...you remember the old song, right? On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...and on it goes. These twelve days of Christmas are part of the Christian Liturgical calendar, the calendar that follows the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The first day of Christmas is what we refer to as Christmas Day and represents the birth of the Divine Human in the form of Jesus. We might say that this day serves as a reminder that there is a Spark of Divinity in every human...that each of us is fully human and fully God, and that in any moment of our choosing, we can allow that Divinity to shine through.

This coming Thursday, January 6th is the 12th Day of Christmas...the day of the *Epiphany*...the day that the wise ones in the book of Matthew finally beheld the Christ Child, and the end of the Christmas Season on the Liturgical Calendar.

The word *epiphany*, from its Greek roots, means *to reveal*. And so, we can see why the Christian calendar of feasts and celebrations might have given this name to such a miraculous happening. In the story, magi (priests, and likely astronomers) from the East have been travelling for 12 days, following a very bright star that is shining over Bethlehem. There has been a prophecy since days of old that a new ruler would be born in the City of David and believing that this might be the birth that would fulfill the prophecy, they set out on their journey, bearing gifts for the new king. Remember that this king was supposed to be a *political* king...not a spiritual leader.

If I could hear your thoughts, I might hear something like this...why is she telling me this? How does this help me in my New Beginnings in 2022?

If we look at the story through a metaphysical lens, we might pull out a deeper meaning, one that is useful in guiding us along our Spiritual path. What if Christmas Day represents the birth of Christ Consciousness in, through and as humanity? Does this mean that every person on the planet is suddenly enlightened? I can only speak for myself. Knowing the Christ Potential lives in me and is seeking to be revealed does not mean that I always think, speak, and act from that place. Of course, that is my desire, but I have found that it takes Practice. Life is a journey. Each of us is evolving and changing physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The 12 Days of Christmas serve to remind us that the revealing of the Christ on earth is up to each one of us. The potential is already there; the journey is about taking the steps necessary to finally bring the potential into form and experience in the world...to actually see the Christ Child.

It is told that the magi came bearing gifts...gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These may have been given in the story because they were very valuable items...the family did not have the resources to raise such a king as the prophecy predicted. Joseph was a carpenter and likely did not earn kingly wages.

But what about turning once again to the lens of symbolism? What might these gifts represent? One interpretation is that we, too, are to offer our gifts to the Source of all that is, in gratitude for Life Itself. Symbolically, gold represents purity. In order to allow our Christ Light to shine, we offer our gift of *willingness* to maintain our alignment with Spirit, with what is Right and True.

Frankincense is a type of incense; the rising of its smoke represents our prayers being lifted to the heavens. So, in order to support ourselves in revealing the Christ within, we offer the gift of an *active prayer life*.

And myrrh was used to embalm the body when it was laid to rest. Might this remind us to offer the gift of *surrender*, letting go of the need to control...letting go of what no longer serves, and *laying it to rest* so that a Higher Ideal might be reached? It's something to think about...a new perspective to take as Christmas approaches in 2022.

Rev. Diana

So, the title of today's message is *I've Had an Epiphany*. Are you curious what it is? Would you like me to share it with you? Okay...get ready...

Gratitude is not a noun, it's a verb. Gratefulness is not a feeling, it's an action. Thankfulness isn't real until it's expressed. One more time...gratitude is not a noun, it's a verb. Gratefulness is not a feeling, it's an action. And Thankfulness isn't real until it's expressed.

Let's explore this a little bit. I used to think of gratitude as a state of being, an experience I am having, a feeling that is moving through me. And this is where it starts, but unless I allow it to move me into action...to become somehow different than I was before the experience, what good is it really doing? If I sit in my comfy chair in the morning and write down five new blessings, and feeling the gratitude, but then as I move through my day, I don't share those gifts, how has that made the world a better place?

Don't get me wrong...there's nothing wrong with this kind of gratitude practice. It has actually been proved to have very positive effects on our physical, mental, and emotional health, and that's never a bad thing. But until we are actively expressing our gratitude as thankfulness, and circulating our Good by sharing it with others, we are stopping short of making the greatest, most positive impact possible.

Gratefulness is not static. It is an energy in motion and it's part of a cycle...the cycle of Circulation. Circulation is one of the Six Pillars of a Spiritual Life. Three of these Pillars require action within...these are Spiritual Study, Affirmative Prayer, and Meditation. The other three Pillars require action without...Circulation, Sacred Service, and Celebration. Each of these pillars is necessary to a well-balanced and fulfilling Spiritual Life.

Gratitude is not just an emotional response. It is a choice we make, an attitude or disposition, "a habit of the heart." (Alexis de Tocqueville) Bro. David Steindl-Rast says that "gratefulness is the inner gesture of *giving* meaning to our life by *receiving* life as gift."

In order that I continue to reap the benefits of grateful living, gratefulness makes requirements on my life, on me as a human being. It requires that I share the gifts I have been given. This is an integral part of maintaining the Cycle of Grace.

Esteemed Spiritual Teacher and humanitarian Henri Nouwen, spoke of Gratitude as a discipline. Now there's an uncomfortable word for some of us. He said that:

Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of complaint. I can choose to be grateful when I am criticized, even when my heart responds in bitterness. I can choose to speak about goodness and beauty even when my inner eye still looks for someone to accuse or something to call ugly. I can choose to listen to the voices that forgive and to look at the faces that smile, even while I still hear words of revenge and see grimaces of hatred.

Rev. Diana

This year I am using the book *Living in Gratitude: Mastering the Art of Giving Thanks Every Day* by Angeles Arrien, as a loose guide for the structure of this year's messages. In her introduction, she suggests that there are four universal portals to gratitude...four categories of experience for which, and through which, people of all cultures and traditions are led to gratitude.

The first is *Blessings*...the good things in our lives...and that we can choose to respond to the blessings with blessing. We sanctify, or recognize the presence of Grace in our lives, which serves to invoke or confer the good that already exists in potential. She names blessings as "gifts that open doors to healing, connection, meaning, and transformation."

The second portal she speaks of is *Learnings*. Whenever we are learning, we are growing. She reminds us that "a challenge is an invitation to grow or extend beyond what is presently knowable and familiar." Expressing gratitude for the growth in our lives encourages spiritual transformation to continue.

The third portal to gratitude is *Mercies*. We might think of mercy as a disposition of kindness and compassion; an unexpected forgiveness or clemency; we might see it as charity, benevolence, or generosity. When we experience mercy, we are grateful. And when we offer mercy, gratitude comes our way.

The last universal portal she speaks of is *Protections*. It is instinctual for humans to want to protect themselves and their loved ones from harm; and so, there have always been practices, prayers, rituals, and invocations to call forth protection. Whatever the form we choose, Protections help us to feel safe. They help to build our faith in the Good, and so they lead us to gratitude.

These are interesting ideas to ponder as we Begin Anew...Where are the blessings in my life? What are the learnings, and how am I being transformed by them? What part does mercy play in my life? Have I experienced the mercy of another? And do I grant mercy when another has fallen? And where do I stand in relation to protection? Do I have practices that help me to feel safe? Do I know I am always protected? And does that knowing live in my head, or also in my heart? Have I embodied it? All good questions to contemplate as we move into a new year filled with possibilities.

There has been a lot to chew on this morning...you may need to pull up a transcript if any of this is speaking to you. But I'd like to throw one more idea out there...

Traditionally in our culture, January is a month for new beginnings. Did you know that January was named after the Roman god Janus, the two-headed god whose one head faces the past and the other faces the present and the future? It is really important, as we move into this month of gratitude and new beginnings, that we gaze

in both directions. Sometimes we hear it said that we should never look back. But there is a lot to be gained by looking retrospectively at what was positive, and at those things that were challenging. And by also looking forward, we remain hopeful, enthusiastic, even excited about the many possibilities that lie ahead.

Poet Robinson Jeffers pays homage to this human ability to look both backward and forward. He writes, "Lend me the stone strength of the past and I will lend you / the wings of the future, for I have them." And so do I. And so do you.

Arrien asks us to consider: "What do you appreciate today that has roots in the past? What solid, wise, and genuine experiences of your past are calling to be brought forward into your life in the present and future? What winged dreams, hopes, and inspirations do you long to manifest?"

Right here and right now, in this perfect and sacred moment, individually and collectively, we begin anew...and we seal our new beginnings with prayer. I invite you to take these words as your own, knowing them as True for you.

I speak my Word in the presence of the One, as an expression of the One, bringing Its own desires into form and expression by means of me. The one Source, the one Essence, Substance, and Process that I call God, is both Creator and created. And so, I know that I Am a perfect and intentional emanation of Spirit. There is nothing missing or broken in me, as I Am one with the Perfection of Life Itself. Knowing this as my potential, I claim, accept, receive, and embody, a life filled with New Beginnings. Every moment is another opportunity to start again, to see myself, my life, and my world through a new set of lenses. And so I do.

I see myself as a perfect expression of Divinity, with all of my strengths and weaknesses, with all of my faults and my inherent Beauty.

I see my life as an unlimited expression of Spirit, knowing that all things are possible when I place my faith in the Power and Goodness of God.

I see my world as completely transformed by our individual and collective intention and action, and by our commitment to living prayerfully. I see a world that is peaceful, abundant, beautiful, and free...where all beings practice kindness, compassion, and forgiveness...where each one treats the earth and her resources with care and respect. I see a world where all needs are met...where all beings have plenty of nourishing food, the safety and comfort of home...where medical care, education, healthy relationships, right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging are commonplace for all...a world in which every being is valued for its inherent Goodness and Light...where the Peace we cultivate and feel within shows up in the world as Integrity, Forgiveness, Kindness, and Generosity.

I know that our individual lives are enriched by prayer. Our shared Practice is *Creating A World That Works For All*. (Sharif Abdullah) We know that holding a shared Vision is a powerful tool for transformation. I let this Vision become Real in my heart and mind. I infuse it with my Faith. I carry it with me every moment of every day.

I know that there is no lack or limitation in God...there is no reason that we cannot have such a world. Serving as the hands, feet, voice, and heart of God, doing Its work in the world, all things are possible.

I give thanks for this day filled with blessings. I Am so grateful for all that has brought me to this place and time, and to this stage of my life. Knowing that gratitude is only complete as it is culminated in action, I offer Thanksgiving to the One Source, to the God of all Creation, and I commit to sharing my unique gifts with the world.

I release this prayer with great Joy, trusting in the Loving and Lawful Presence to carry it into form and experience, because that is Its Nature. I let go and let God...calling it done. And so it is. Amen!

Musical Meditation – *God Bless Us All*, by Jan Garrett and JD Martin

Rev. Diana – Moving Into Celebration

Please repeat after me as together we affirm:

There is Power in our Prayer...

There is Power in our Vision...

We are creating a world that works for all...

Right here, right now...

And so it is! Amen!

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Each Sunday, we invite you to join in the celebration of the work we are doing in the world by sharing of your financial Good, should you choose to.

If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth and our monthly spending. I would be happy to give you more information.

As we move into this time of giving, let these words reverberate in your heart and mind, knowing the Power of our word; and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I bless this gift, sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!


Offertory Music – *How Can I Serve?* by Ricky Byars


Gratitude Prayer – Lucinda & Rev. Diana


Invitations – Lucinda

And to start off the New Year...

 **Tuesdays, 3-5 pm – Michael Bordeaux’s Book Club** will return on January 4th. The next book is *Church of the Wild: How Nature invites Us Into the Sacred* by Victoria Loorz.

 **Rooted in Spirit: The Six Pillars of a Spiritual Life, Part 2. Wednesday Classes Return January 5th, 2:00-5:00 pm in Suite H.**

 **Thursdays, 3-5 pm – *Metaphysical Bible* returns on January 6th.** (on-going, drop-ins always welcome)

 ***Praying in Color - Treasure Mapping.*** Please join Ellie Thompson on **Saturday, January 8th from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm** as she guides us in creating a prayerful treasure map. Please let Ellie know in advance if you are planning to attend, so that she can be sure to have plenty of materials on hand. Suggested Donation: \$20

And later this month...

Dear Self...Another Day of Insight. Please join Rev. Diana on **Saturday, January 22nd** from 10 am to 3 pm for a ***Day Retreat***, designed to guide you in starting or expanding your journaling practice. **Please contact Rev. Diana at revdiana@mysticheart.org for more information, or to get signed up.**

If you'd like prayer support, we have prayer request cards and envelopes on the fireplace, as well. If you would like to meet with a Prayer Practitioner in person, I am available for a quick prayer after the service. Or contact one of the Mystic Heart Practitioners for a full Session during the week. Our contact information is listed in the bulletin and on our website, as are all of the Mystic Heart events and activities.

To continue the celebration, there is food and fellowship next door immediately following the service. So let's stand and sing our closing song.

Closing Song: *Love Be with You* , written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP & Gary Lynn Floyd