

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland
Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 17, 2021

Welcome and Introduction – The Rev. Charles Rowins

Hymn 119, stanzas 1 and 5

As with gladness men of old

Opening Sentence: The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Confession

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and have done those things which we ought not to have done.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

Absolution

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Invitation to Venite and Psalm

O Lord, open thou our lips,
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

The Venite - seated

*O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
and the strength of the hills is his also.*

*The sea is his and he made it,
and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.*

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17 – see lesson insert

First Lesson – I Samuel 3:1-20 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Second Reading – I Corinthians 6:12-20 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Hymn 127, stanzas 1-3

Earth has many a noble city

The Gospel - John 1:43-51 - see lesson insert

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Sermon – The Rev. Charles Rowins

The Apostles' Creed - standing

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;*

*And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer - seated

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Suffrages - seated

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;
And grant us thy salvation.
Endue thy ministers with righteousness;
And make thy chosen people joyful.
Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;
For only in thee can we live in safety.
Lord, keep this nation under thy care;
And guide us in the way of justice and truth.
Let thy way be known upon earth;
Thy saving health among all nations.
Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;
Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
Create in us clean hearts, O God;
And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collects for Sundays, the Second Sunday after Epiphany, and Vocation in Daily Work

O God, who makes us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Grant us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the days to come may be spent in your favor, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Almighty God our heavenly Father, deliver us in our various responsibilities from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men.
We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

Announcements and America

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them. Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 128, stanzas 1 and 2

We three kings

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia.

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday of Epiphany, January 17, 2021.

If you were God and wanted to communicate with the likes of you and me, and had only one card to play from a full deck of cards, which card would you play? One card only. The six of clubs? The ten of diamonds? The jack of spades? Or perhaps the ace of hearts?

I think it would be the latter. The ace. It could be an ace from any suit, but let's say hearts reflect the love of God. So, if you were God, you would offer the ace of hearts.

A very good choice, and how appropriate to our Church calendar. There is Advent. There is Christmas. There is Epiphany. What do the first letters spell? ACE.

Of course, God would play the Ace, because God has already played the Ace. God would play that card again and again because the need for the message of love doesn't end.

And, if this wasn't reason enough to play the Ace of Hearts, consider another interpretation of ACE. Anticipation. Clarity. Enthusiasm. Yes, another form of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

A stretch? Perhaps. But isn't a stretch exactly what God is doing? God reaches out, again and again, hoping that we will respond. This is the subject of Michelangelo's "God and Adam" in the Sistine Chapel. Not a stretch, but The Stretch.

For you and me, the optimal touch – desired both by God and by you and me – is the Annunciation and subsequent Birth of Christ. That birth is the Ace of Hearts. That birth is God's love, expressed in a manner that we humans can appreciate.

As many of you know, most of my ministry was in schools. In all but one assignment, the ministry component was front and center. Either my job title was chaplain, or the school's name where I served was that of a saint. But when I accepted a position at Johns Hopkins, the ministry component was less clear.

Except for one thing. The motto of The Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins is the Optimal Match. A match of what? A match of ability and challenge. Very bright kids take courses that, while a stretch, are accessible and rewarding given the student's high abilities.

For me, this notion of stretching fit perfectly with ministry. Instead of Advanced Calculus and a Math Aptitude score of 790, there is a human being wanting to know God and a God wanting to know that human being. A form of mutual stretching until there is a match. Not too easy. Not too difficult. Something just right.

Can you say Jesus of Nazareth? God Incarnate. Creator of the Universe in human flesh. To my way of thinking this Divine strategy is absolutely brilliant. It is the ultimate Optimal Match.

However we label it, this perceived relationship is why you and I are here. We share a sense that when we treat the historical Jesus as a gift from God, we are touching, however briefly, the Creator, as the Creator is reaching out to us. God initiates. We respond.

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel? Now that is a stretch. But there's some truth in that assertion. Beyond the painting is an understanding about Birth and Life and Death and New Life that you and I are pursuing, along with many others. Michelangelo's brilliant work reminds us that we are pilgrims, on a journey. And because this journey is intensive, it makes sense to journey together.

Yes, there are some with the spiritual confidence to journey alone – though, truth be told, they are never alone, as Dr. King, whose life and ministry we remember tomorrow, would remind us. Most of us need companionship, don't we, especially in difficult times. And here we are. On this journey together. God reaches. And we reach. And, every now and then, there is that touch, maybe even a clasp, that keeps the journey alive.

And once that touch, that clasp, is experienced, we want more. A sentiment beautifully expressed in our final hymn today: "Come with us, O blessed Jesus."

The theme is “let us nevermore leave thee.” (**Hymn 336 -Come with us, O blessed Jesus.**)

That’s why we’re here. We don’t want “to leave thee,” the God who is playing the ACE of hearts, hoping that we will respond to the invitation. We are both humbled by the invitation and honored, and we are happy to accept, and to invite others to join us.

Our lessons this morning are all about God playing the Ace of Hearts, the Ace of Love.

In our first lesson (**I Samuel 3:1-20**), the Lord is trying to reach young Samuel. But Samuel doesn’t recognize that it is the Lord. He believes that it is Eli calling him. Eli has to correct Samuel three times before Samuel understands that the voice might be the Lord’s and that he, Samuel, must listen very carefully. When Samuel finally gets the Lord’s message, he, Samuel, is distressed, because his mentor, Eli, is in trouble. But Eli assures Samuel that what the Lord wants to do, the Lord will do, and it will be acceptable to Eli. “It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.” With that assurance from his mentor Eli, Samuel became “a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.” A happy outcome.

Today’s Psalm (**Psalms 139:1-5, 12-17**) is a very positive statement of the loving power of the Lord and our response to that loving power. “I will thank you, Lord, because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well.” The Psalmist continues: “How deep I find your thoughts, O God! how great is the sum of them!”

Every now and then, we sense an initiative from God, which can lead to a response from us. That exchange can be scary because it is so powerful. Sometimes the experience is so vivid that we can name the time and place and circumstance. But, the more often we have such experiences, the less scary and more comforting they are. The fact that we are here suggests that, for you and me, comfort is winning. And isn’t that exactly the message that God intends in Jesus?

At first reading, today’s lesson from First Corinthians (**I Corinthians 6:12-20**) seems out of place. Its purpose though is not alarm us, but to remind us that we

always have a choice between what God intends for us and how we behave when we forget what God intends. It's a lesson about freedom. "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit."

Like all gifts from God, respect it. Share it appropriately. If you do, in the words of today's gospel (**John 1:43-51**), "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

A life of response to God's touch, God's initiative, is a really special life. In response to Nathanael's question, Philip says, "Come and see." Our presence here suggests that we have responded, we have returned the touch. And it sure feels "optimal."

Amen.

Lessons for 2nd Sunday of Epiphany – January 17, 2021

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: I Samuel 3:1-20

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" And he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for your called me." But he said, "I did not call my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said,

“Here I am.” Eli said, “What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me, May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.” So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, “It is the Lord; let him do what deems good to him.” As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel as a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

Lord, you have searched me out and known me;

you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

You trace my journeys and my resting-places

and are acquainted with all my ways.

Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,

but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

Your press upon me behind and before

and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain to it.

For you yourself created my inmost parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I will thank you because I am marvelously made;

your works are wonderful, and I know it well.

My body was not hidden from you,

while I was being made in secret and woven in the depth of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your book;

they were fashioned day by day, when as yet there was none of them.

How deep I find your thoughts, O God!

how great is the sum of them!

If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand;

to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.

Second Reading: I Corinthians 6:12-20

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Hymns for Second Sunday of Epiphany – January 17, 2021

Hymn 119, stanzas 1 and 5

As with gladness men of old

As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we ever more be led to thee.

In the heavenly country bright, need they no created light;
thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.

Hymn 127, stanzas 1-3

Earth has many a noble city

Earth has many a noble city; Bethlehem, thou dost all excel:
out of thee the Lord from heaven came to rule his Israel.

Fairer than the sun at morning was the star that told his birth,
to the world its God announcing seen in fleshly form on earth.

Eastern sages at his cradle make oblations rich and rare;
see them give, in deep devotion, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Hymn 128, stanzas 1 and 2

We three kings

We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.

O 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 for ever, ceasing never over us all to reign.

O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light!