

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

-Isaiah 60:1

Why We Love Epiphany

Come January, winter in Pittsburgh is dreary. Barren Christmas trees line the streets. Early sunsets and dismal weather forecasts stretch on indefinitely. Darkness looms, literally and figuratively. Every year, I find myself desperate for something encouraging...so it's no wonder I love Epiphany. Stars in the sky, light in the darkness! Magi and myrrh! Frankincense and gold, wonder and riches!

Christmas, with all its busyness, can leave everyone a little burned-out from all of the celebration. Too much food, too much festivity. Pageants and presents run amok. Let Epiphany, in all its wondrous glory, be the balm the over-stressed soul needs! Celebrations need not be complicated. It is a simple tale: wisemen following a star, arrive bearing gifts to the Christ-child, God made manifest in human form. Christ, our Light in the darkness. Christ revealed to the world. Really, what's not to celebrate?!!

A few ideas...

1. Sparkler Parade

As we celebrate the Light of Christ in the world, we also acknowledge that we are called to be light in the world. At St Paul's, Pittsburgh, we represent this with a **sparkler procession** prior to our evening Epiphany service. Everybody is invited - even big kids love sparklers. We troop out into the bitter January darkness and make a glittering parade. We march around the church, letting our sparklers shine!

I like belt out "This Little Light of Mine," as a way to keep warm. As the sparklers sputter out, we process in to the church for the start of the service. Perhaps pause for hot chocolate in the nave? Sparklers can be purchased online or from many party stores. (A note of caution - make sure to light your sparklers far enough away from the doorway or smoke will blow back in and set off the smoke detector.)

2. Epiphany Photo Booth

Although the three Magi make an appearance in most Christmas pageants, Epiphany is the more appropriate time to welcome their arrival in the Nativity story. One fun way to celebrate their presence and gifts is by creating an Epiphany Photo Booth.

Having set aside certain costumes and props after our Christmas Eve pageant, we create a photo-worthy scene: the infant Jesus, represented by a doll swaddled in the manger, the glittering star hanging above, and our beloved decrepit donkey. We use a starry night background (available from online party suppliers) but you could paint your own.

Participants are offered costumes from our more “royal” pageant costumes - primarily drapes and robes of fancy fabrics, and ornate crowns and hats. I also set out various props - golden boxes and ornate bottles.

We provide a photographer who takes pictures both with the church iPad (so we’ve got copies!) and with personal devices. We encourage people to hashtag any pictures they post on social media with hashtags identifying our church (#stpaulspgh) and the event #epiphany.

As much silly fun as it is, the real question we pose to everyone is, “What will YOU bring Him?” or what are the gifts you can share with Christ and with others in His name? It’s just one more way to invite people into the story of Jesus’ birth and his ministry.



3. Have Magi in the Epiphany Service

Before you pack away the Christmas pageant costumes, get one more use out of them. Invite children to dress as wise royalty and have them process during the service. Invite your magi to bring up the gifts at the Eucharist or to serve as ushers or readers. No need to limit participation to three! Kids can bring costumes from home, or for simplicity, you could just provide paper crowns for the kids to decorate. If you want to create a really fabulous procession, you could work with groups of young people to make gigantic king/wisemen puppets like Emily Given, director of children and family ministry at Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Dallas made, below.



4. Give Gifts to Those in Need

Lest we ever forget that the world into which Christ entered was as dark and broken as our own, we need simply to recall the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, demanded by King Herod in hopes of ending the reign of the prophesied messiah. The Holy Family were themselves in turmoil and transition, compelled first to travel to Bethlehem and then forced to flee as refugees to Egypt. One way we remember these tragedies and sacrifices is by seeking out opportunities to help children in need in our community.

This year our diocese staged a collection drive for a local crisis nursery which is a safe haven for fragile families in challenging life situations. If there is no crisis nursery nearby, certainly food pantries are in need of baby items - diapers, wipes, formula, etc. Encourage parishioners to bring baby items and assign the children to bring them forward to be blessed.

There is so much darkness and tragedy in the world; it is more important than ever that we turn to the light of Christ, beckoning like a North Star. We shine as His Light in the world. Epiphany reminds us, and makes it easy to be that light!

5. Paper Star Ornaments

The wisemen used a star to guide them. Celebrate the star by creating beautiful paper

ornaments. [This teacher's website](#) contains some nifty ideas for making stars out of various materials. Children can offer congregants stars as they leave service, or process in to the service holding their stars high.

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