

Opening Worship

Welcome

Welcome everyone to this moment for worship. May you be nourished and may you be at home.
Let us pray.

Breathing in we pause.
Breathing out we are still.

Sheltering God
It is through You that we make meaning
It is through coming close to You
As You come close to us
That our lives can tell their true story
And sing their beautiful song
May we know you here, God with us,
Whatever we are carrying
Fatigue, fear,
Loss or hope
curiosity or cantankerousness
may you reveal to us again
the ever-new landscape of your Love,
in Jesus name,
Amen. CES

Rather than reading a Scripture text this morning I want to tell you four stories that I hope will play in us as we tell our own stories this morning. Let us listen together for stars and exodus, exile and annunciation in these stories and in our lives. We'll begin with a star – an epiphany.

How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Ps. 137

Ephiphanies & Stars Matthew 2:1-12

There is a story that wise ones long ago looked up into the night sky and saw a star. Their eyes were drawn to it through their own lives of reverence and curiosity they couldn't get it out of their thoughts.

This was not just any star.

It was a wonderous star, one not on any of their star charts.

They just had to follow it.

Their following took them on a long journey.

Even through Jerusalem,

a place of power, power of religion and learning and the seat of a fearful and grasping ruler.

But the one they sought was not in the city.

The star lead them to a small, seemingly insignificant rural place, where the buses didn't run and the broad band was sketchy and there wasn't much in the way of overnight accommodation.

It was there they found God born into the world. God filled them with joy.

They worshipped, left gifts and knew from all they had experienced to go home by a different way.

Holy One, May we be prepare to see even the stars that are not on our star charts

Stars that lead us to You, who fill us with joy and draws us into worship

May we be filled with the divine impulse to find, not a new home but a new way to our home in You..

Wilderness

There is a story of a people enslaved, captive to the forces of productivity, racism,, nationalism and injustice.

In this story these forces are called Pharoah.

Moses leads the people out of this captivity and they travel for years and years through desert wilderness.

They long for it to be over. Even though they are on a freedom journey, they complain and bicker.

They set up idols to make them feel better quickly.
 They don't want to spend all this time dependent on God for manna, this long time learning who they are.
 Sometimes they even look back to the way things were in Egypt and wish they hadn't left.
 But slowly, slowly, in this wilderness they do, learn more about who they are and how they are to be.
 They come to know again, how to be the people of God.

**Holy One, may we recognize our Pharaohs. May we not turn to the ease of captivity or the temptation of quick answers.
 May we take the time we need to learn who we are, why we are and how we are to be.**

Exile

There is a story of God's people, many years later, again taken captive by military and cultural powers.
 They are taken to a place as unfamiliar to them as some of the places we're in now.
 They can no longer visit the temple in Jerusalem, the place they called holy,
 the place they had come to believe God lived.
 As time went by, they understood they could learn to sing God's songs in a strange place,
 that place which in the story is called Babylon,
 but which we might today call COVID or post Covid.
 In exile they learned that God was not only in one place. They could worship God in any place.
 They just had to come close to God, who came close to them.

Holy One, may we let go any place that keeps us from You. May we learn to know you in everyplace.

Annunciations Luke 1:26-38

Finally there was once a young woman to whom an angel, a messenger of God came. And there are many, many other stories of annunciations, God's announcing God's presence, calling us to some seemingly impossible work.

The young woman's name was Mary and God's call to her was not to tweak some small part of her life but to open herself, body mind and spirit to receive what God would seed within her.

To nurture God's life in her and to birth God into the world,
not suddenly, not easily, not efficiently, but wondrously, hiddenly.

We know her name was Mary but perhaps as we are together today we could name her church.

Let us through as we share our varied experiences in conversation with these Scripture stories open ourselves to God's life within us and God's leading to where the holy is to be found.

Gathering Prayer

God of the story,

You are in and out of the stories we read

Calling us into them

And calling us out of them.

Give us courage to listen to our own curiosities

As we read old stories

Dare us to ask the questions

Hidden in the heart of the text.

Lead us to mine – with heart and mind

And desire and desperation –

The many meanings

In the one story.

Because this is where we find you

And where you

Find us.

Amen Padraig O'Tuama

May we sense the Spirit in our time together and may we be blessed.

