Epiphany celebrates the arrival of the wise men from the east (astrologers?) at the birth of a new king, signaled by the appearance of a new star. This star led the wisemen to the new king and the establishment of a new kingdom. Not knowing their destination, they followed the star, seeking “diligently” for that which they were hoping to find. The story affirms the invitation to all persons and all peoples to experience the Presence and actions of the Sacred in their lives. It also affirms the necessity of trusting the call, being intentional in following it, and avoiding distractions in finding what you were hoping for.

Reflection: Is there one word in the above which catches your attention? What thoughts or feelings are generated? What are you hoping for today?
In Need of Prayer or Home Communion?
St. Luke’s Prayer Ministers are available during the 10:30 AM service to pray with you. If you would like a name added to our Prayer Chain or someone who needs Home Communion, contact Beckie in the Church Office.

PLEASE PRAY FOR..............
THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:
Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael, our Presiding Bishop, and Scott, our Diocesan Bishop and for ALL the people and parishes in our diocese. Pray especially for Church of the Holy Spirit in Randlett. And for all people within the world-wide Anglican Communion; pray for the people & leaders of The Church of Canada.

OUR NATION & ITS LEADERS:
Our government leaders that they may live & work in a spirit of calm reason & cooperation on behalf of the common good.

THOSE WHO ARE FACING SUFFERING & HARDSHIP:
Robert+++ (husband of Iris Thompson), Rita+++ (Baden), Emmy+++ (granddaughter of Deedee Sihvonen), Jennifer+++ (Strachan) Tom+++ (brother of Joe Cordery) Kaylee+++ (friend of Beckie Raemer) Randy+++ (brother of Beckie Raemer) Pam+++ (Bro), Sean & Jordan R. ++++ (family of Charles & Bonnie) Laurie+++ (friend of Barbara Wine) Jane+++ (friend of Leslie Wood) Mary+++ (wife of Ray Freer) Steve+++ (husband of Beckie Raemer) Tom & Lou+++ (friends of Ann Deyo) Clark++ (friend of Teresa McMillan)

THE HUMAN COMMUNITY AROUND THE WORLD:
† Pray for the speedy release of the thousands of immigrant children who remain in federal custody.
† Pray for our nation and the whole human community that we may find the wisdom to live in greater respect and harmony with each other and our planet home.
† For safety and recovery for all people effected by natural disasters throughout the world.
† For healing for every soul captured by fear, bigotry and resentment. May we all develop the ability to see the Sacred in those most different from ourselves.

THOSE WHO HAVE DIED......
PLEASE GIVE THANKS FOR......
Our Layreader Leader, Jane Hamilton and her family.

For those having Birthdays this week:
Al Galik today; Emily Fiscus and Charlie Martz on Tuesday; Maralee Lopez and Fr. Charles on Thursday.
The Collect of the Day: What does it look like; what is the human experience of the Holy showing up in our lives? The Feast of the Epiphany is a celebration of just that; it is a celebration of the manifestation or the incarnation of the Christ, Love Itself. We pray that our eyes may be opened to see the Christ however and whenever Love appears; with Jesus our Brother, Teacher and Lord. Amen

From the Hebrew Scriptures:
Our first lesson comes from the 60th chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 60 is part of Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66), Third Isaiah is situated in the sixth century BCE as the exiles from Babylonian returned to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, a major conflict had arisen between those who remained and those who returned. Living conditions were extremely difficult. Jerusalem was in ruins. The people were now divided again not against some outside threat or enemy but among themselves. Please read with me from the Hebrew tradition by reading the parts in bold print….Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. Here ends the reading.

From the Christian Epistles:
Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better his ideas concerning the dimensions of God’s eternal purpose and grace and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church. Please read with me from the Christian epistles by reading the parts in bold print…… This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles -- for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. Here ends the reading.

Form the Christian Gospels: Matthew 2:1-12
Priest: The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Matthew.
People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.
In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.
Priest: The Gospel of the Lord.
People: Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Offertory Sentence:
Priest: My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, when you come to the Table of the Lord, come not only to receive the presence of the Lord, but also to give your life completely to Him. As Jesus said, the Greatest Commandments are these: People: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[Hebrew & Christian scripture passages are reprinted with permission from the World Council of Churches. Passages from extra-biblical sources are reprinted with permission from World Scriptures.]
Is God an Artifact of Our Brains?
The Feast of the Epiphany Yr. C - January 6, 2019

The Feast of the Epiphany is normally associated with the idea of religious revelation or “manifestation.” Put simply, the birth of Jesus in a manger among people and animals is a literary symbol of the birth of the revelation of the Sacred in the world; or to use theological jargon, the manifestation of the Transcendent in the midst of the immanent. That reminds me of a dumb story…..Once upon a time, there was an elderly couple who had been married for over 50 years. The wife, standing in front of a mirror, said to her husband who is reading a newspaper,”I feel terrible. I look old and fat and wrinkled. I could really use a compliment right now.” The husband replied, “Don’t worry, Hon…Your eyesight is darn near perfect.”

So here’s the question of the day: does God - understood as some supernatural reality - reveal Itself to us or do our brains create the experiences we interpret as manifestations of God, the Holy, the Transcendent? During the Christmas break I came across a new field of study of which I was largely unaware: “neurotheology.” Neurotheology is a field of study that tries to understand the relationship between the human brain and religious experiences, practices, rituals and beliefs. Men and women engaged in neurotheology are interested, not only in building bridges between science and religion, but also in helping us to understand what is true about religion within the frame of the natural world; the world of human experience and life. I have just started reading in this area, but I would like to share some of what I have learned thus far.

Let’s begin by thinking about religious or spiritual experiences. There is a large variety of experiences people have that seem religious (in the universal sense) or transcendent in nature. Consider the person who leaves the stresses of home and office behind to take a long stroll in the woods. People speak about losing themselves in the solitude of the trees, the rhythm of one's legs and the soul-searching lyrics of the soothing music streaming in through one's headphones or the quiet sounds of nature. As one writer put it, "Sometimes, but not always, I begin to feel the architecture of my inner world. It starts with a barely-perceptible quieting of those racing thoughts and over-analysis, an internal hush that slowly pervades my entire body and sense of self until I ceased to be aware of my exhaustion, the passing of time, in anything other than the sheer ecstasy of being alive. The edges around my sense of self begin to blur and I feel completely connected to the world in which I exist in that moment.” This experience of being one with or in unity with all things is commonly experienced and interpreted as evidence for or as the revelation of a higher consciousness.

Other examples of experiences seen as revelatory that take place in contexts that are not overtly religious include the “runner’s high,” falling in love, and the overwhelming sense of love, joy and attachment that accompanies giving birth to a newborn. Within the architecture of the church or retreat center, participants report such mystical experiences as the presence of the Christ in the Eucharist, the prompting of the Holy Spirit nudging one to make a particular decision or engage in a particular action and a deep and undeniable feeling of love and unity with one’s fellow parishioners, God and/or the world during times of worship and/or prayer.

The question facing us is this: are our religious experiences caused by a supernatural being (or
reality) or are they the result of brain function? Many who favor religion and belief in the supernatural will immediately declare that our mystical experiences of the presence of the Christ in the Eucharist is caused by the presence and activity of a supernatural being. Many who are hostile to religion will immediately declare with equal vigor that all experiences described as mystical, spiritual and religious are the result of natural events occurring in the brain and body.

Researchers such as Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Sarah Lane Ritchie, Ph.D. would advise both groups to “hold your horses.” When we set our biases aside, we are forced to admit that the human community has not yet arrived at a method of investigation that will allow us to settle this question. Dr. Newberg: “Many people who experience spiritual and mystical experiences have radically different kinds of experiences about reality than what average people tend to experience during their everyday lives. If that is the case, I think we need to understand why people have these unique experiences and what they mean? Are they just illusions, delusions, or are such individuals getting glimpses of something that is a far more profound perspective on the entire universe than typically experienced? The short answer is: ‘We do not know.’”

But it’s not all bad news. Yes, it is true; we are currently unable to definitively answer the questions of God’s existence, of God’s nature and whether our mystical experiences are the result of natural causes, i.e., brain and body activity in response to the environment or the result of supernatural activity acting upon the human brain and body. We do know, however, that certain religious practices correlate consistently with particular patterns of brain activity. We know that choosing to engage in certain religious rituals such as prayer and meditation correlate with particular brain patterns and these brain patterns correlate with positive health effects. Dr. Newberg has noted that a large body of research shows that many religious practices have a tremendous positive effect on human beings. There are studies that indicate the beneficial effect of religious practices on human psychology such as coping strategies and the experience of more positive feelings and mood. Such activities also have been shown to benefit our bodies by reducing blood pressure and heart rate while simultaneously improving our immune systems. There is even evidence that these types of practices may have a positive effect upon human genomic expression.

Dr. Newberg: ”The interactions among beliefs and practices and brain functions are complex. This field of research can help us to determine how all these elements interact and answer such questions as: ‘Which are the elements that are most effective or the “active ingredients” of contemplative or mind-body practices?’ For example, when a person says a prayer, is it the words themselves that are important or is it the body movements? Is it the ritual or is it the feelings that the person experiences? We do not know for sure. Research can help break down these parts to achieve a better understanding of the effects of such practices on health.”

One final thought to close; beware of forcing an answer to the question of natural vs. supernatural causes of religious experience and correlative brain activity. Sarah Lane Ritchie notes that it is theology and theologians who have traditionally insisted upon two ideas: (1) reality is split in two between the natural and the supernatural and (2) the cause of our mystical experiences must be supernatural. Such thinking is not helpful because it forces us to ignore other possibilities including the possibility of a “model of the God-nature relationship in which spiritual realities are seen in and through the natural world itself.” And this possibility leads to another: “humans can become active participants in their own spiritual development” and their experiences of the Sacred. Happy New Year!

Sources:
Exciting Happenings

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: You will find info about our church and what to expect when you visit. www.stlukesparkcity.org. There is information about our missions, finances and programs. You can view previous sermons through a link to You-Tube on your phone or home computer. Go to You Tube, St Luke’s Episcopal Church Park City, UT.

ST. LUKE’S CARE GUILD: If you or someone you know has any requests or needs, please contact Katherine at katherinemartz@comcast.net or Harriet, harrietmstephens@gmail.com, (435) 655-1888.

CHRISTMAS RUMMAGE TABLE: Please check out our Christmas Rummage Table in the coffee hour area. All proceeds go to support St. Luke’s Ministries and Missions Fund. If you have items to donate, please leave them on the table. Thank you for your support.

AUTUMN GOSPEL GROUP FOR WOMEN 50ish & UP: Autumn Gospel meets the fourth Saturday morning of each month from 10 to noon, in members' homes. We use books as a springboard to share and discuss our own spiritual journeys at this stage of our lives. We are reading "Character is Destiny: Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember" by John McCain and Mark Salter (2005). Please join us for coffee, fellowship and a lively discussion! For more info please call Nancy Conrow, nancy.conrow@gmail.com or 435-640-0556.

CONSIDERING JOINING THE ST. LUKE'S COMMUNITY? JUST WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH? Our rector would be delighted to make an appointment to meet with you. He will do his best to answer your questions and to help you to feel welcomed and included at St. Luke's. When you are ready to have a conversation, just let him know at either: pastor@stlukespc.org or 435-901-2131.

CENTERING PRAYER: Meets Friday mornings at 10:00 AM in the Library. Please join us in this contemplative practice of Holy Silence.

WOMEN'S GATHERING: We meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6:30 PM. Please bring a drink or a dish to share.

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY: Our study is "The Way of Prayer" in the companions in Christ series. We meet Wednesdays in the library at 6:30 pm. If you would like to join the group please talk to Mary Parsons.

CHRISTIAN CENTER DINNER: Who: St Luke's parishioners providing food to seasonal workers
When: Tuesday, January 8 at 5:15 PM
Where: 1283 Deer Valley Drive
We've had a good start for homemade casseroles, main dishes and salads to be made and delivered to the Christian Center, hot and ready to serve, for January 8. We still need your help as we'll be providing food for about 150 seasonal employees. Please sign up on the poster at church, or contact Linda Dugins, ldugins@gmail.com
We can use your volunteer help to serve and clean up as well. I look forward to a good turn out of food (in disposable containers) and St Luke’s volunteers next Tuesday!

Is It Time For You To Revisit Your Charitable Giving Strategy?

Due to changes in the tax laws that went into effect starting in 2018, fewer taxpayers are likely to benefit from itemized deductions than in the past. Talk with your tax advisor to see what will work the best for you.

You can now make a donation directly from your mobile phone, computer or a tablet.
Go to our new website: www.stlukesparkcity.org
to make a one time donation or set up a recurring donation from a credit card or checking account.
You can also text the word "Give" to 385-219-4489 to make a donation right from your phone.