

Epiphany



EPIPHANY DEVOTIONS

DAYS OF ACTION: JAN. 4-6
to Support Temporary Protected Status



PART ONE: GOD'S INCLUSIVE VISION OF LIGHT

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-6, Healing for the Discouraged

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” (vs. 1-3)



Reflection: Epiphany recalls the manifestation of Christ; illuminated by a star's bright light that broke into a dark sky and was made visible to kings who crossed boundaries from a far distance to celebrate the power of hope and love Jesus offered to the whole world. It was a power that came to confront traditional rulers like Herod, and to build up vulnerable and voiceless populations. God's community who first heard the promise for light through the prophet Isaiah were depressed and discouraged. After decades of exile and separation from their homeland, the chapter just before described the community's stumbling and violent journeys and dark, desolate mourning. Now, the prophet painted a picture of possibility for a return to their homeland, family reunification, and new life ahead.

Remembering such promises, cultures globally continue to celebrate Epiphany in ways that demonstrate unity and acceptance—as in Mexico City, where 200,000 are fed bites of a mile-long “Kings Cake” (see link and photo above.) This year, one particular group seeking an enduring welcome and hope is the more than 195,000 Salvadorans with Temporary Protected Status, as the current period of TPS is set to expire in March 2018 and a decision from USCIS due likely by January 8th. As a new report, [“Extending Temporary Status for El Salvador: Country Conditions and U.S. Legal Requirements”](#) from American University & Washington College of Law has documented, El Salvador remains at great and repeated risk of natural disasters, is the most violent country in the world, has widespread corruption, suffers economic instability, and faces ongoing public health challenges; all of which could deem it eligible for renewal of TPS.

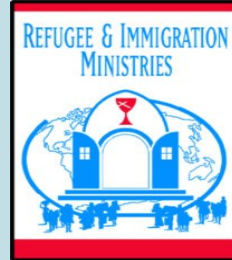
Story: Isabel, age 50, and her two young children came to the US in 2001, reuniting with relatives previously settled in the Boston area. After an earthquake ravaged her native El Salvador, Isabel was unable to return home and TPS allowed the family to put down roots in the US. Isabel built and ran a family bakery before moving to work as a liaison with her local City Hall, where she connects local residents with city services. Her now adult children have enrolled in local universities and built their own families, and Isabel now has three US citizen grandchildren. Loss of TPS would divide this family, and Isabel's eight-year-old granddaughter recently wrote a letter to President Trump asking him not to deport her grandmother and father. Isabel worries about finding a job in El Salvador if deported, as hiring practices there favor applicants under 35.

Actions/Resources:

- Review the report mentioned and linked to above, and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition's TPS support resources and TPS Toolkit at: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/issues/tps/>
- Contact your US House legislators to urge support for H.R.4253, the American Promise Act, or the bi-partisan H.R.4384, the ASPIRE Act, and call your US Senators to urge they pass the S.2144, the SECURE Act. For each one, call: 202-224-3121.

Prayer: God whose Light brings hope beyond heartbreak, opportunities to replace oppression, and futures for families, we seek your solutions in these moments of suffering and insecurity. Offer light to children anxious about losing parents and to parents with arms aching to embrace their children without fears of deportation. And especially in this Epiphany season, illumine our USCIS to make decisions that choose protections for Salvadorans and grasp dangers that make returns unwise. AMEN.

Devotions by Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea & Sister Mary Ellen Lacy. Questions? Contact ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org.





PART TWO: JESUS DRAWS ALL TOGETHER

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12, The Visit of the Wise Men

"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.... Then Herod secretly called for the Wise Men.... and sent them to Bethlehem.... They saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and.... 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." (2:1-5,7-8, 10-12.)



Reflection: As early as in the book of Numbers 24:17, prophecies had foretold "a star shall come forth out of Jacob." Now generations later, the three kings saw the fulfillment of the promise God had made to all people, not just the Jews. By coming from far nations, they showed how the birth of Jesus offered the incarnation of God's promise of hope, covenant of peace, and possibility for unity for the whole world. Throughout Latin American and Mexican cultures, persons of faith celebrate "Dia de los Reyes" to re-enact the three kings' journey. Since today seems like a time of darkness for TPS holders, Dreamers, and all immigrants awaiting acceptance, we can, like the Magi, also take action to witness to the possibility for unity and hope for the peoples of the world. Like the kings, we can commit to leave our 'homes' of contentment and go to unfamiliar places to point others to hope, trusting that God walks with and guides us to find Light and liberation at the end of the journey for TPS holders & Dreamers.



Men from San Salvador dress as the Three Kings for Epiphany celebrations. From *The Epiphany: What is it and how do people around the world celebrate?* From Catholic Online, 1/6/2016

Story: On Nov. 6, 2017, USCIS ended TPS for 2,500 Nicaraguans; giving them only 14 months to leave the US. USCIS also postponed a decision for six months (until July 5) for 57,000 Hondurans whose TPS was set to expire on Jan. 5, 2018. Who are our Honduran neighbors who have had TPS? Yessinia and her husband are one example. After being granted TPS in the US in the late 1990's following hurricane devastation in their home country of Honduras, and unable to safely return, the couple and their three children—including a US citizen son—have worked hard, bought a home, and established a new life and friendships for over 18 years in the US. When their eldest son Jose celebrated his 21st birthday in 2017, he sponsored Yessinia and her husband for legal permanent residence. They obtained a green card just months before the USCIS postponed a renewal decision for TPS. But others are not so lucky. We must act to illuminate the need for justice for all TPS recipients. (*Story from Alianza Americas.*)

Actions/Resources:

- Go here to learn much more about the background of TPS for Hondurans: <https://cliniclegal.org/resources/temporary-protected-status-honduras>
- Sacrifice each day one source of contentment in honor of a displaced immigrant who awaits justice. Tell your neighbors what you are doing and why, and call your US congressional representatives at 202-224-3121 to share your support for Hondurans and others with TPS. See <https://greateras1.org/cws-condemns-tps-termination-for-nicaragua-and-denounces-insufficient-six-month-extension-for-honduras/> for suggested talking points.

Prayer: Great God, thank you for coming into an unwelcoming world. Help us journey like the kings towards the light of justice. Strengthen us to persevere like the magi to search out and follow Your light while we advocate for TPS holders and dreamers. May our efforts enlighten Congress to provide safety, family unity, and protection for all facing insecurity and separation. AMEN.

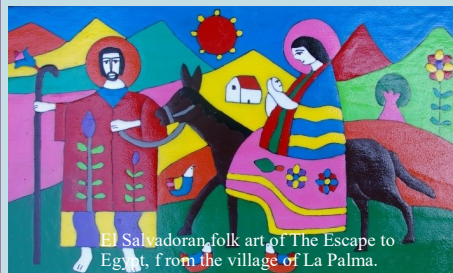
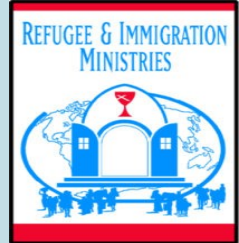
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PART THREE: FIGHTING FEAR, ESCAPING FOR SAFETY

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-23, Jesus' Family Becomes Refugees

"Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remain there until the death of Herod....When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men....and there was wailing...for...children." (Mt. 2: 13-14, 16, 18.)



El Salvadoran folk art of The Escape to Egypt, from the village of La Palma.

Reflection: The context of today's story of escape was set in the previous passage when the three kings were warned of Herod's coming fury caused by jealousy of Jesus. Now Jesus' family flees the country as the ruthless king unleashes his horrors to kill all boys below age two in the Bethlehem area. How we wish the need for families to flee violence and lack of security no longer remained! Yet in reality, 1 in 5 families in El Salvador have faced crime and violence in recent years, Honduras remains one of the most dangerous places for violence against women, while children in the Central American Minors program recently terminated by Trump are deeply fearful to be sent back to violent conditions. And, for nations like Haiti, protections are needed also for families who fled its conditions of natural disasters, extreme poverty and dangerous diseases. Jesus' family's escape confirms God's desire for children & families to dodge danger and receive protection whenever possible. It demonstrates the wisdom of families who choose leaving home over threats and destruction if they remain. And, it calls us all to be "fear fighters" who will likewise honor family sacrifices by receiving them with hospitality and offering pathways of new possibilities and protections in fresh lands.

Story: In Thanksgiving week, USCIS announced its decision to end TPS for as many as 59,000 Haitians, with an 18 month transition period before TPS effectively expires on Jan. 22, 2018. These included Marie Partait, a 15 year neighbor in south Florida, who said, "I have six children. My mom and dad were killed in the earthquake. My country is nothing now." For years, she has faithfully worked a \$9/hour job, helping others find recreation at Gulfstream Park, in Hallandale Beach near Miami. Children like Ronyde Christina Ponthieux likewise are pleading, "Think about the children and parents who would be deported. I love my parents!" <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article185941008.html>.



Photo: Lynne Sladky/AP

Actions/Resources:

- Read here about contributions of Haitians to both the US and Haiti, and reasons Haitians cannot safely return: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-haitians-should-stay-1514331750> and https://cliniclegal.org/resources/temporary-protected-status-haiti#_ftn3. Then, write a letter or hold a vigil to support them! Find helps at: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/issues/tps/>
- Continue to stand with immigrants and refugees in the National Migration Week of Jan. 7-14 ahead. Access "Many Journeys, One Family" resources as a guide for further reflections: <https://www.sharejourney.org/resource-library/national-migration-week-toolkit/>.

Prayer: God whose Son was a fleeing migrant, comfort all who awake today hounded by threats against self and family. Open our hearts to the voices of children and parents pleading that we do all we can to keep them together. Make us builders of paths that protect and policies that fight pain. AMEN.