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Celebrate Epiphany With Joy, Renewal

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By Deborah White
UM General Board Of Discipleship

Wearing crowns and singing "We Three Kings," children walk the halls of Central United Methodist Church in Albuquerque, N.M., searching for Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. When they find the baby, they sing, "Oh come let us adore him."

The Epiphany celebration annually attracts 60 to 80 children, all eager to act out the story of the three wise men from Matthew's gospel.

"The trek through the church is the thing they love -- finding the baby Jesus like the three kings (did)," said Christy Albright, director of Christian education. "They understand the story better because they have lived it."

This is one of many ways churches celebrate Epiphany with joy, excitement and spiritual renewal. Epiphany, on Jan. 6, marks the coming of the wise men to the manger.

Epiphany and the season that follows celebrates God making himself known to us through Jesus. It is the season of revelation.

In the movement of the Church Year, Epiphany brings the Christmas cycle to its climax. In Advent, we long for God's appearing and remember his promises. In Christmastide we celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. In Epiphany, we mark various ways that Jesus manifested God's glory to all people.

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Scriptures and emphases in the time after Epiphany include:

- The baptism of Christ
- The calling of the disciples
- The teaching and training of the disciples
- The ministry and miracles of Jesus
- The transfiguration of Christ

"Epiphany is a major feast in the life of the Christian year and a major feast of the manifestation," said the Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards, director of worship resources for the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship.

The symbol of Epiphany is light. It is a time to absorb the message of Christmas and to spread the light of God's love through Jesus.

Epiphany celebrations -- festive or contemplative -- are a good way for churches to launch the New Year. Some plan outreach activities from Epiphany until Ash Wednesday.

Some pastor have called for prayer and fasting during this time of Epiphany. Church leaders said practicing spiritual disciplines transformed their congregations.

"Prayer changes everything," said the Rev. Tina Carter, pastor of The Rock United Methodist Church in Cedar Park, Texas.

"Sometimes we put so much energy into the period before Jesus, into the wrapping, that we forget to do the unwrapping of both Jesus and ourselves," said the Rev. Bernard Ritchea, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Edna, Texas.

Epiphany rituals are important, said the Rev. Mary Alice Gran, director of children's ministries for the General Board of Discipleship.

"Frequently there is such an emphasis on planning Christmas we have that let-down feeling."

Illustration Above: Kathrin Burleson's painting portrays three revelatory events traditionally associated with the Feast of Epiphany. The water pot in the foreground recalls the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turned water into wine. The star in the distance was followed by Magi from the east, who ascertained by it that Israel's Messiah had been born. And the glorious light outshining the star speaks of the Babe to whom that star pointed.

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