

A VISITOR GUIDE TO WORSHIP
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY





We believe God loves you – no exceptions.

WELCOME TO EPIPHANY!

We are so glad you are here. Everybody you see was a newcomer at one time or another and we've all had questions—probably the very same ones. So, don't hesitate to ask a question!

When you visit an Episcopal Church or any church at all for the first time it may feel a little strange and intimidating. We want you to be able to relax and feel welcome and able to participate as you choose. Worship is a time to join with others in giving thanks to God for God's gifts to us. It is a time to allow yourself to enter into God's presence, to be touched by God's love. Here is a guide to some of what you might expect if you go to a worship service at an Episcopal Church.

Worship does not just minister to our minds, but to all of our senses. Our worship is rich in symbolism and incorporates elements from both ancient and contemporary liturgies. This guide will help familiarize you with some of what you will experience in our services.



AS YOU ARRIVE AT EPIPHANY

We recommend arriving a few minutes before the service so you can get yourself settled. There will be ushers to welcome you and provide you with a service bulletin. You can sit anywhere you would like. In the rack in front of you in your pew you'll notice two books: *The Book of Common Prayer*, (sometimes called the BCP or Prayer Book) that has a blue cover and contains the services of the Episcopal Church and *The Hymnal 1982* which has a red cover and contains worship music.

Once you are settled in your pew, you'll find the order of service printed in your bulletin. Alternatively, you can open the BCP to the correct page as cited in your bulletin and place it beside you in the pew. Hymn numbers are marked in your bulletin and you can find those hymns in the red hymnal.

You may notice some people kneeling or bowing before they enter the pew (reverencing the altar) and many others do not. Some people kneel and pray before the service begins as a way of preparing themselves for worship, and many others do not.

During the service you may notice some people making the sign of the cross or crossing themselves. To do this, begin by touching your forehead, moving to touch the middle of your chest, then to your left shoulder, followed by your right shoulder, and finally back to touch the middle of your chest.

We often cross ourselves at these points in the liturgy: during the opening *acclamation*, beginning with the words "Blessed be God;" when we profess belief in the "resurrection of the dead" during the Creed; after we confess our sins, during the *absolution*; immediately before or after receiving the Eucharist; at the blessing from the priest at the close of the liturgy.

There is a wide spectrum in the Episcopal Church of how people embody worship. We invite you to practice what feels comfortable and meaningful to you.





THE BEGINNING OF THE SERVICE

A few minutes before the service, the organist will play the Voluntary. This music is meant to help us center ourselves and prepare for worship. You'll know it's time for the service to start because you'll see the Verger (who leads the procession) standing at the rear of the church.

The Episcopal service begins and ends with a hymn and procession of the crucifer (cross bearer), acolytes, choir members and clergy down the aisle. You'll notice that some people bow when the cross passes their pew. This is an acknowledgement that Christ is with us during worship and goes with us as we leave church and carry Christ with us into the world.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The remainder of the service is divided into two parts: The Liturgy of the Word and The Liturgy of the Table. The Liturgy of the Word contains readings from the Bible, the sermon, statements of our faith (The Nicene Creed), and Prayers of the People. All of the biblical readings used in an Episcopal service are part of a set “lectionary” which assigns readings for every Sunday on a three-year cycle. Other denominations also follow the same set of readings. Parishioners read the first two readings.

The reading of the Gospel (meaning “good news”) gets special attention. This is because the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contain the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and are central to our faith. Normally a hymn welcoming the Gospel is sung, and the Gospel book is brought into the middle of the assembly and read by a deacon or priest. Everyone stands for this reading and turns and faces the Gospel Book.



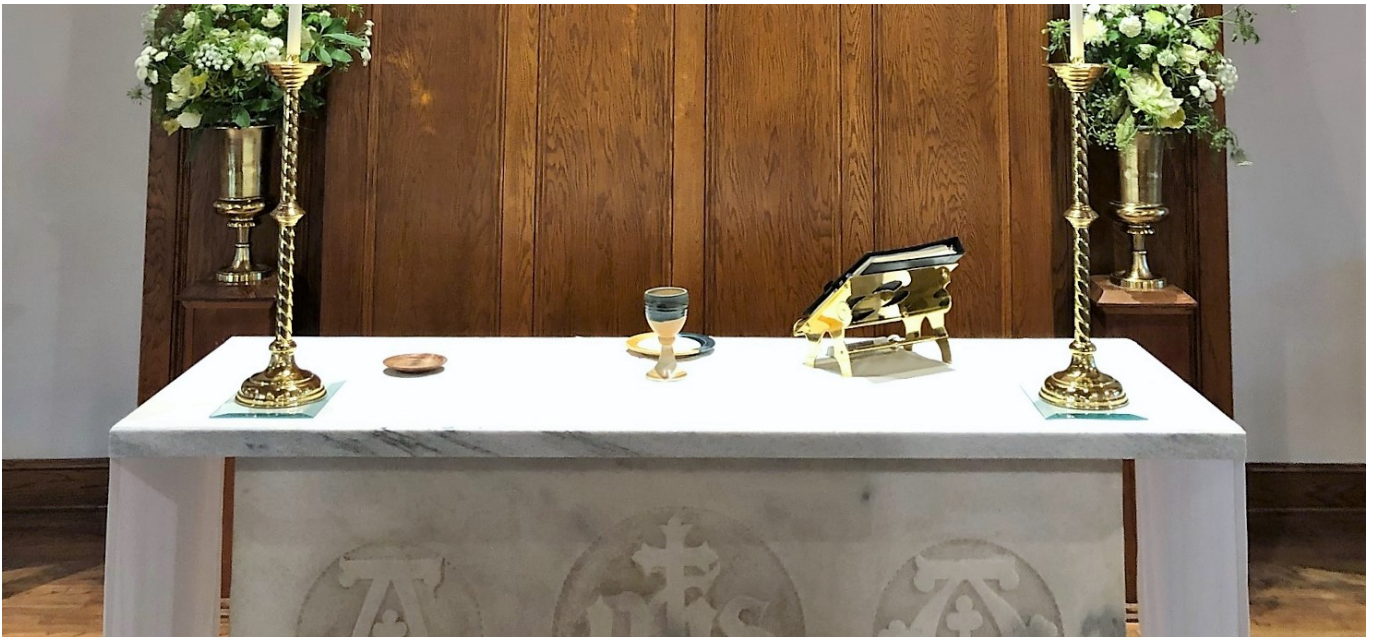
Following the Gospel, a sermon is preached. The sermon is meant to take what we have heard in the readings and engage those learnings with the everyday events that we experience in our lives.

After the sermon, we stand and say the Nicene Creed, an ancient statement of faith used by most Protestant churches which binds us together with Christians of all generations and Christians all over the world. A member of the church then leads the Prayers of the People. These are petitions that include prayers for the Church, the

world, the nation, those who are sick and those who have died.

After the Prayers of the People we say the Confession, an opportunity to confess together all of the ways we have not loved God or others. At Epiphany most people will kneel for the confession as a sign of penitence. However, you may sit if you find kneeling difficult. At the conclusion of the confession, the presider stands and says the absolution, which serves to remind us that God forgives our sins.

The presider then bids “The Peace.” This can be an awkward moment for people who are newcomers. Ritually, what we are doing is enacting God’s welcome and invitation to right relationship with one another before we go to communion. We do that symbolically by saying “Peace be with you” and shaking hands. At the Peace, you may greet the people immediately around you.



THE LITURGY OF THE TABLE

This portion of the service focuses on the celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

Offertory

During this portion of the Liturgy of the Table, the Deacon or Priest receives the gifts of the bread and wine from worshippers who bring them down the aisle to the altar. The table is set for communion while the Ushers pass the plate to collect the congregation's gifts or offerings. The choir sings an anthem while the collection is taken. It is fine for you to put money in the plate or to put in nothing at all. Many people also choose to give online through our website or QR code instead.

Eucharistic Prayer

At the Eucharist, the Priest (called the "Celebrant" for this part of the service) leads and prays an extended prayer on behalf of God's people. It begins with the *Sursum Corda* (Latin meaning "Lift up your hearts") and continues with a retelling of the story of the Last Supper. Near the end of the prayer the Celebrant asks the Holy Spirit to be present in the bread and wine and in us. The people stand at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, but some people will kneel after the *Sanctus* (Latin for "Holy"). Either choice is fine, the Episcopal Church welcomes a diversity of practice.

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer we pray the Lord's Prayer together. Following the prayer, the presider breaks a large round disc of bread called *The Host* into two pieces, symbolizing Christ's death on the cross. After this symbolic breaking, some more practical preparations are made which might include pouring additional chalices of wine and breaking the bread into pieces for distribution. Words, called the Fraction Anthem, are either spoken or sung at this point that reflect the actions taking place. Once the bread and wine are ready the presider invites people to the meal by saying, "The Gifts of God for the People of God."



Receiving Communion

At Epiphany, everyone is welcome to receive communion. People generally come forward and stand or kneel at the altar rail to receive communion. Ushers will tell you when it is time for your row to go up to the altar. If you are confused about how to receive communion, this is a good time to watch what others are doing and follow their example. If you don't want to receive communion, that is totally fine. You can remain in your seat, or you can also come forward and cross your arms over your chest. The priest will offer you a blessing instead of communion.



If you DO want to receive, hold out your hands out palms crossed and the priest will put a piece of bread in your hand. (Gluten free wafers are available. Just mention it to the priest when she comes to you at the altar rail.) Then another liturgical minister will come with the cup of wine. Here you have a choice. You can eat the bread when it is put in your hand and then take a sip of wine from the cup. It is helpful for you to touch the cup and help guide it to your mouth. If you don't want to drink from the cup you can also leave the bread in your hand and dip the bread in the wine and then place it in your mouth. It is also totally fine to receive only the bread or only the wine; either is considered a full receiving of communion. (During COVID-19, the priest will dip your wafer lightly in the wine before placing it in your hand. Once you have received, simply return to your seat. Often music is sung during or near the end of communion.



THE CONCLUSION OF THE SERVICE

When everyone has received communion and have returned to their seats, the Eucharist ends with a Post-Communion Prayer said by all present. The priest then gives the Blessing which asks God to bless each of us as we take our faith out into the world. Another hymn is sung by everyone as the acolytes, choir, and the priests process back down the aisle and out of the church. At the end of the hymn, the people are dismissed by a priest or deacon.

If you are a newcomer, the clergy would love to greet you at the door on your way out. We are glad you have chosen to worship with us and would love to help you get connected here in any way that feels meaningful to you.



The Rev. Amy Dills-Wright,
Rector



The Rev. Carmie McDonald
*Associate Priest for Community Engagement &
Family Ministry*

LEARN MORE ABOUT EPIPHANY

- Scan the QR Code to learn more information and details for newcomers to our parish. Explore the site to learn more about Epiphany and our ministries.
- Introduce yourself to us by an email to the clergy, or by filling out our online visitor card.
- Be sure to sign up for our weekly e-newsletter to stay up-to-date on everything happening at our parish! The SUBSCRIBE button is located in the footer of our website at epiphany.org.

