

The focus of our essay question for this year is driven by recent events in Minneapolis and St Paul, Minnesota where armed agents of U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have roamed neighborhoods of these cities making arrests of alleged illegal aliens – with a fierce predilection for people of color and those whose native language is not English. Many of these “illegals” have turned out to be either US citizens or of legitimate immigration status, some of them children as young as five years. ICE agents have also, thus far, taken the lives of two civilians, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, both of whom were acting as protectors against this campaign of intimidation.

Shortly after the killing of Renee Good on January 7th, the Rt. Rev. Craig Loya, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, released this statement:

“The Herods of the world, and their fear driven campaigns of terror, are ever with us...

As people of the Epiphany, our call is to stand in the midst of a world where Herod continues to flex and posture, not in outrage or with reciprocal violence, but gazing in wonder and expectation for the joyful manifestation of Jesus wherever the poor, the outsider, the weak, and the oppressed are to be found. As people of the Epiphany, in the midst of a world where cruelty tries to pose as power, we continue to rejoice in the assurance that absolute and final power resides in poor and crucified Jesus, who alone is the true king. Our Epiphany joy is not some naive and shallow notion that everything will be ok, when everything is so obviously not ok. Our Epiphany joy is the deep, defiant, revolutionary hope we have in the assurance that love is the most powerful force in the universe. Like the wise ones searching for Bethlehem, we wait, we watch, we follow where love leads, knowing that only God’s action in the world can finally and fully heal all that the lust for a false and hollow power had broken down, world without end.”

Bishop Craig Loya, ECMN

The full statement is available at: <https://episcopalmn.org/blog/bishop/bishop-loyas-response-events-minneapolis-january-2026>

Imagine yourself in the pulpit on the First Sunday of Epiphany, the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. With reference to national events and liturgical texts of the day, what is your message to your congregation? What is your invitation to those gathered? What is the vocation of the church, the community of the baptized, in this hour? How does the church’s calling in this hour resonate with your story and calling to ministry, and to being a SIM Becoming Beloved Community scholar?

Along with the Scriptures for this Sunday, bear in mind that we are collectively renewing our Baptismal Covenant (BCP, pp. 304-305) in the context of welcoming the newly baptized on that day.

Lectionary readings for 1 Epiphany, Year A: *Isaiah 42: 1 – 9; Acts of the Apostles 10: 34 – 43; Matthew 3: 13 – 17*