

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
January 3, 2020**



Prelude

Welcome to Worship

Friends, out of an abundance of caution, we have returned to online only services. We welcome all of you who are joining us on the internet. It is not the same as being together in our sanctuary for worship. But, for now, this online community is our sacred space. And God meets us wherever we are.

Now, let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship.

Preparing Our Hearts

“Rise Up, Shepherds and Follow”

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

There’s a star in the east on Christmas morn. Rise up, shepherd, and follow.
It will lead to the place where Christ was born. Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow, follow; rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow the star of Bethlehem. Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

If you take good heed to the angel’s words, rise up, shepherd, and follow.
You’ll forget your flocks; you’ll forget your herds. Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow, follow; rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Follow the star of Bethlehem. Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

Opening Prayer

O Star-flinging God,
whose light dances across eternity,
dazzle us into your presence
this new year.
Open our hearts to the mystery of your love.

Awaken us to your presence,
knit to the ordinary.
Reveal to us what is possible, but not yet present.
Heal us, that we might be healers.

Reconcile us to you and to ourselves,
that our living might be reconciling.

Stop us often, we pray
with news that is good
with hope that holds
with truth that transforms with a Word
tailored to this trail we're on.

May the word of your grace guide our steps
like the sun by day
and the north star by night,
as we travel into the gift of a new year. Amen.

Hymn

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory”

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth;
you, who sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah's birth:
come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king!

Shepherds, in the fields abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant light:
come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king!

Sages, leave your contemplations; brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great desire of nations; you have seen his natal star:
come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king!

All creation, join in praising God the Father, Spirit, Son,
evermore your voices raising to the eternal Three in One:
come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king!

Scripture Lesson

Message By: Karen Skaggs

Happy New Year to everyone and belated Christmas wishes. Although, technically the holidays are not over...not until January 6. As explained by Kimberly Winston, of Religion News Service in her article "What is Epiphany?", January 6, is when Christians all over the world celebrate Epiphany. In some places, the day is known as "Three Kings Day" after the wise men, or Magi, who, the Bible says, brought the infant [Jesus] gifts and proclaimed him the Son of God.

What do you mean, the holidays are not over? Maybe you've heard of "The Twelve Days of Christmas?" ... the title refers to the period between Christmas Day, when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, to Epiphany, when they mark his manifestation — "incarnation," in some Christian traditions. In fact, the word "epiphany" is drawn from the Greek and means "manifestation."

The period refers to the story in Matthew that tells of some kings who followed a star in the East to find the baby in the manger. They brought him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But didn't the wise men visit Jesus on the night of his birth? Like in the church Christmas pageants?

Who knows? The Bible isn't exactly a timetable. In fact, the Bible says nothing about the number of kings, their robes, turbans or crowns they wear in every Christmas pageant in the world, nor does it say they rode on camels or how they learned the star would lead them to a baby in Bethlehem. People

have just filled in all those blanks since Epiphany became a church feast in the second century, making it one of the oldest of Christian celebrations.

How is Epiphany celebrated? That depends on where you are and what kind of Christian you are. Most U.S. Protestants mark the day on the Sunday closest to January 6 and it is usually limited to that day's church service and sermon. But it opens the church's "season of Epiphany," a time when sermons and lessons focus on the miracles of Jesus; the season ends on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, the start of the Lenten season.

Catholics also celebrate Epiphany on the actual day, and the Pope will deliver his annual Epiphany homily during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The following Sunday, many Catholic priests will deliver homilies that focus on Jesus' baptism. Eastern Orthodox churches, too, focus heavily on Jesus' baptism at Epiphany, with priests in places such as Russia, Bulgaria and Greece tossing crucifixes or crosses into the water, which devotees then dive for.

...Are there any Epiphany traditions that don't involve becoming a polar bear?

You bet. First, some Christians give gifts all over again on January 6. In Spain, children leave their shoes outside in the hopes they will be filled with candy and presents if the youngsters have been good. Naughty ones are told they'll get only clumps of coal.

In Italy, children receive gifts on the Epiphany morning from a witch known as "La Befana." The story goes that the wise men visited an old woman when they were looking for Jesus and invited her to come along. She was too busy. Then the shepherds stopped at her shack and extended their invitation. "Sorry, too busy!" Since then, she flies through the air in search of the Christ child, leaving gifts for other good children in her search.

In Spain, Mexico and other Latino countries, Jan. 6 is "Dia de los Tres Reyes Magos," or Day of the Three Wise Kings. To celebrate, people make a "roscon de reyes," or king's ring cake, a pastry with a tiny figurine of a baby baked into the dough. The idea is that the baby will be revealed in a slice or a bite of bread, just as Jesus was revealed as the Son of God to the kings.

Catholics in New Orleans have taken the king cake to a new level. Bakeries all over the city offer elaborate, frosted, fruit-filled confections, all baked with a plastic baby on the inside. Customers eat them throughout the season of Epiphany, indulging right up to Ash Wednesday. ... king cakes have become an emblem of that city's Mardi Gras festivities.

According to Martin O'Direain on the website Xyuandbeyond.com, the day in Ireland, known as Women's Christmas or Nollaig na mBan (pronounced null-ag na man) is also known by many names, including the Epiphany, Three Kings' Day, Little Christmas or the 12th Day of Christmas. January 6th was first celebrated as a feast day in the 4th century to commemorate Jesus' introduction in human form. In Ireland the day is used to celebrate the women who have worked so hard to make the holiday season memorable for their families and communities. I'm just Irish enough that I may just make this a new tradition in my home; all for rewarding hard work and thus.

Throughout Ireland, the 6th of January is the day that all the decorations come down and are put away for another year. The old tales say it is bad luck for anything to be displayed after this date. On this night there is a tradition of lighting candles in every room of the house to banish the old year and bring in the new with the light.

Epiphany, is one of the oldest Christian holy days that was adopted by the Western church in the 4th century. 'Little Christmas' got its name because, under the Julian Calendar, Christmas day celebrations were held in January, whereas under the Gregorian calendar, Christmas day falls on December 25.

The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of Jesus, early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. Many peoples rejoiced during the winter solstice when the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.

And finally, some thoughts from [Jan Richardson](#) of [The Painted Prayerbook](#) "As we travel toward Epiphany and savor the final days of Christmas, this is a good time to ponder where we are in our journey. As we cross into the coming year, where do you find yourself on the path? Have you been traveling more by intention or by reacting to what's come your way? What direction do you feel drawn to go in during the coming weeks and months? Is there anything

you need to let go of—or to find—in order to take the next step? In the coming months, what gift do you most need to offer, that only you can give?”

For Those Who Have Far to Travel

An Epiphany Blessing

If you could see
the journey whole
you might never
undertake it;
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.
Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping
step by
single step.
There is nothing
for it
but to go
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:
to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star

that only you
will recognize;
to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions
beyond fatigue
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.
There are vows
that only you
will know;
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.
Keep them, break them,
make them again:
each promise becomes
part of the path;
each choice creates
the road
that will take you
to the place
where at last
you will kneel
to offer the gift
most needed—
the gift that only you
can give—
before turning to go
home by another way.

Hymn of Affirmation

“What Child Is This”

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through; the cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail, the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, one and all, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high. The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!

Prayers of Intercession

God of wonder and mystery,
God of the stars and the universe,
God of winding ways and straight paths,
we gather today with gratitude
for the gift of your constant presence,
your trustworthy guidance,
and your daring risk-taking with us.
You dare to love us despite our inability to respond fully.
You dare to care for us, despite our challenge in caring for others.
You dare to walk with us, despite our fickleness.

On our own journeys
toward the stars and guiding points you put before us,
you continue to lead us forward,
guiding us by the teachings of Jesus
to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly in your loving shadow.

As we struggle with the political wrangling of this world,
the wars waged for both justice and greed,
the violence committed daily against the innocent,
let alone the pain of broken relationships and loss,
you remain steadfast in your care and devotion
for your entire creation throughout the universe.
It is almost too much to take in sometimes.
And even in our doubts and disbelief,
our struggle to understand and constant misunderstanding,
and our flat-out ignorance about your ways,
you remain constantly present to us.

We pray for peace in this world, Lord,
the kind of peace in which we celebrate diversity,
are joyfully challenged by adversity,
and share in the joy that is to be found everywhere.
We pray for those who are lonely,
that you might lead us to reach out and be friends.
We pray for those who are hungry,
that you might lead us to offer sustenance.
We pray for those who are lost,
that you might lead us to give hope and direction.

We pray for the countries of the world,
that we might find a way to work together to lift one another up.
We pray for our leaders in Washington,
that your Spirit might guide them
to set an example for our country and the world
to work together rather than against one another.

We pray for your church in the world,
that we may seek to build up this body
and seek to repair the theological divisions that are tearing us apart.
We pray for church leaders,

that they may continually seek your Spirit
in their lives and their daily decisions
as they lead this congregation.

And we pray for ourselves,
that we might continue on this journey,
learning the lessons you offer,
seeking the fullness of your perfection,
and live as you would have us live.
These prayers and hopes we offer
in confidence and gratitude of your love and presence.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
we pray the prayer which Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

I want to thank you for continuing to give generously. Your gifts allow us to continue to be the church. So, I would like to take this moment to say thank you, and to bless your financial offerings and the offering of your lives.

Offering Prayer

Lord our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
We give you thanks and praise and we dedicate to you our offering.
In this we also dedicate the workings of our hands,
the thinking of our minds,
and the loving of our hearts.
May each be used for the glory of your kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Closing Hymn

“What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright”

Permission to print lyrics obtained from One License with license #A-723596

What star is this, with beams so bright, more lovely than the noonday light?

‘Tis sent to announce a newborn king, glad tidings of our God to bring.

‘Tis now fulfilled what God decreed, “From Jacob shall a star proceed”
and lo! the eastern sages stand to read in heaven the Lord’s command.

While outward signs the star displays, and inward light the Lord conveys
and urges them, with tender might, to seek the giver of the light.

O Jesus, while the star of grace impels us on to seek your face,
let not our slothful hearts refuse the guidance of your light to use.

Charge and Benediction

Epiphany Blessing

by Jan L. Richardson

“The magi didn’t show up with maps;
they brought gifts that helped Jesus know who he was.

Like the wise men, who had to travel by another road when they left Jesus,
we may find ourselves on some strange and unfamiliar and mapless paths when
we seek to follow Christ.

But in his company, we will, like those wise travelers, find our way home. Amen”

Postlude

Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from One License
with license # A-723596.

