

ZOOM Worship for January 2, 2022
Christmas/Epiphany with Communion

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music: "I Am the Light of the World" VU 87 chorus, verse one, chorus

'I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds have found
their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun.

'I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

One: Like the star shining in the east that led
Wise Ones to Bethlehem,

Two: *A shiny new year has begun.*

One: We are welcomed by the Light,
led by the Light,
warmed by the Light of the Son.

Two: *We worship in the light,
we are nourished by the Light,
we are connected by the Light of the One.*

One: Let us worship together today,
at the beginning of this New Year,

Two: *Let us share our faces and voices and hopes.*

One: Let us pray -

**All: Eternal God, radiant with grace,
thaw our fears and snow-bound spirits;
make us shine with your Word, our hope;
shine with your communion, our life;
shine with your peace, our joy;**

through Christ, who is our Light.

Opening Hymn: "Once in Royal David's City" VU 62

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattleshed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven
who, with God, is over all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall.
There among the poor and lowly
lived on earth our Saviour holy.

For he is our lifelong pattern;
daily, when on earth he grew,
he was tempted, scorned, rejected,
tears and smiles like us he knew.
Thus he feels for all our sadness,
and he shares in all our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love;
for that child who seemed so helpless
is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation *a prayer of confession from the United Church*

All: Source of Light:

**you call us out of night's darkness
to live in the radiance of your love.
You have sent Jesus, Sun of Righteousness
to illuminate the way!
You have trusted us
to be reflectors of your light in all the world.
But, forgive us, God:
too often we have chosen shadow
rather than the light of day;
too often we have chosen other stars to follow;
too often we have heard the promises of Herod,
and believed them
to our peril and the peril of the world.
Forgive us God,
and fill us once again with the radiant promise of Epiphany. Amen.**

Words of assurance

One: God made us;
we are creatures made in the image of the Divine.
Christ has redeemed us;
we are a people forgiven and blessed,
The Holy Spirit sustains us;
be open to the future with confidence and hope.
Be assured that whenever we confess in the name of Christ,
God is there to bless and guide you.

Sung Response “Arise your Light Has Come” VU 79 verse 1

Arise, your light is come!
The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God,
which shines on you today.

Scripture Readings:

John 1:10-18 *The Inclusive Bible*

The Word was coming into the world—
was in the world—
and though the world
was made through the Word,
the world didn't recognize it.
Though the Word came to its own realm,
the Word's own people didn't accept it.
Yet any who did accept the Word,
who believed in that Name,
were empowered to become children of God—
children born not of natural descent,
nor urge of flesh
nor human will—
but born of God.

And the Word became flesh
and stayed for a little while among us;
we saw the Word's glory—
the favor and position a parent gives an only child—
filled with grace,
filled with truth.

John testified by proclaiming, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one who comes after me ranks ahead of me, for this One existed before I did.’ ”

Of this One's fullness
we've all had a share—
gift on top of gift.
For while the Law was given through Moses,
the Gift—and the Truth—came through Jesus Christ.
No one has ever seen God;

it is the Only Begotten,
ever at Abba's side,
who has revealed God to us.

Matthew 2:1-12 the Inclusive Bible

After Jesus' birth—which happened in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod—astrologers from the East arrived in Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage." 3 At this news Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. 4 Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

"In Bethlehem of Judea," they informed him. "Here is what the prophet has written:
'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the leaders of Judah,
since from you will come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "

Herod called the astrologers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, "Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, report back to me—so that I may go and offer homage, too."

After their audience with the ruler, they set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. 10 They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, 11 upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and paid homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

All: Thanks be to God.

Choir: "Peace Chant"

Reflection: "Stars of Wonder"

Hymn: "The First Noel" VU 91

The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay akeeping their sheep
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star,
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night. R

And by the light of that same star

three wise men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went. R

This star drew nigh to the northwest;
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay. R

Then entered in those wise men three,
full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there in his presence
their gold and myrrh and frankincense. R

Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,
and with his blood our life hath bought. R

Virtual Offering:

One: Loving God,
like the Magi who approached the child Jesus,
we follow a star of hope,
Two We come with awe and wonder,
we bring gifts—
ourselves, our time, and our commitment.
One: Send us home a different way,
changed by coming here.
Two: Changed by what we have given and received. Amen

Sung Response: "A Light Is Gleaming" VU 82 (chorus only)

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms throughout the night, living in the light.
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love is burning bright, living in the light.

Sacrament of Communion

One: The Holy One is here with each of us.
Two: God's Spirit is with us wherever we are today.
One: Lift up your hearts.
Two: As God's people we lift them to the Lord.
One: Let us give thanks to God.
Two: It is right for us to offer thanks and praise.

One: We give you thanks, O God, for making your love evident since the very beginning of time when you spoke the word which replaced the darkness of chaos with life-giving light. A light which has nurtured generations of people, and plants and creatures, great and small. A light which also revealed the fear and powerlessness caused by corrupt and evil actions.

Two: And so you spoke the Word which would once and for all dispel the darkness of chaotic lives. Through your love for the world the Word became flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth. The angels carolled glory to you in the highest heavens and peace to all people on earth, and we join with them and with all people to praise your holy name:

MV 203

*O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space,
All earth and sea and sky above
bear witness to your grace.
Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise.
And blessed is the one who comes
and bears your name always.*

One: Holy God, as the travellers with their treasures were overwhelmed with joy on finding Jesus, so we also are overwhelmed on finding out the depth of his love for us.

Two: For Jesus showed just how beloved we are to him, by loving us and giving of himself. On that last night he had to spend with his friends and disciples, as he sat at the table and broke bread with them, he said: 'Take and eat; this is my body which is broken for you. Remember me each time you do this.'

One: After they had eaten, he took the cup, and said: 'Remember me as you drink from this, for it is my life, poured out for you—the beginning of a new relationship with God.'

Two: Remembering your boundless love for us in Jesus Christ, we offer you our praise, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

MV 204

*Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,
Christ will come again!
Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen,
Christ will come again!*

One: Send the power of your Holy Spirit upon these gifts of bread and wine, O God, that we may experience the presence of the Word-made-flesh—Jesus Christ. Breathe your Spirit in us that we may be one body with him—living out his ministry in the world today and every day.

Two: At this time, we also remember all those
with whom you would have us share your feast.
We pray for all who are in sorrow or in pain . . .
all who are ill or alone . . .
all who live with fear, oppression, or hunger . . .
all whom the world counts as last and least . . .
We pray for your church and its varied ministries . . .
for the nations as they strive for peace and justice . . .
for the earth, and the fragile web of life we share . . .
for our families and friends . . .

The Lord's Prayer VU 960

One: Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy,
now and forever.

Two: *Amen*

Breaking the Bread and Filling the Cup

This would be the moment for you to take your own bread and juice, perhaps sharing the words "Jesus Christ the bread of life" and "Jesus Christ the true vine." If you are with another person, you might choose to serve the bread and juice to each other.

Prayer after Communion

One: Holy, wise and loving God,
you provide illumination to the world.

Two: *Light our hearts so that we, like the wise ones,
may be led to experience your presence.*

One: May we leave this table so filled with your
radiance that we may become beacons of your
love and hope to the world. Amen.

Closing Hymn: "As With Gladness Men of Old" VU 81 verses 1, 3, 5

As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore your splendour see.

As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger crude and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to you, our heavenly King.

In the heavenly country bright
none shall need created light;
you its light, its joy, its crown,
you its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
hallelujah to our King.

Commissioning /Blessing

May God, who sang the universe into being, go with you.
May Christ, who is God's love song to the world, attend you.
May the Holy Spirit continue to sing God's love

into each and every heart, each and every day.

Sung Amen: VU 974

Amen! Amen! Hallelujah, amen!

Amen! Amen! Hallelujah, amen!

Reflection
"Stars of Wonder"

As we gather once again virtually, as we watch covid-19 cases rise across the province and the country, it seems a real act of hope and optimism to wish one another a Happy New Year on this second day of 2022. It is also an act of trust and faith to continue to follow the light of God's love through darker times, and to anticipate a time when we will all be together once again.

I imagine that faith, hope, trust and optimism accompanied those wise ones we heard about in our scripture today. We know so little about them from Matthew's description, only that they came from the east – the literal translation meaning "from the rising sun" and that they brought kingly gifts to honour a king. We can assume that they were men of faith, perhaps Zoroastrians from Persia, who studied and believed in signs and prophecies. We also assume that they may have had some knowledge of the politics of the region they were visiting, as they reached out to the local ruler in their search for Jesus.

A fascinating and detailed tradition has grown around these visitors, including their names Melchior, Balthazar and Caspar, which first appeared over 1500 years ago. Although the gospel gives us no clue as to their ultimate fate, some traditions believe that they eventually became followers of Jesus and martyrs of the Christian faith.

The star that prompted their journey has also had its own scrutiny, and some have postulated that it could have been a conjunction of planets that had also been observed by Chinese astronomers in the early first century. We will perhaps never know the real origin of the Christmas star, or of the wise ones who visited with their gifts and their adoration, but we can continue to ponder the mystery and the significance of these travellers and the celestial sign they followed.

It was important for the writer of Matthew's gospel to include this story of Jesus' birth, this tale of a sign in the heavens that caught the attention of those outside the Hebrew community and their response. It is in part a political tale, reminding us that Jesus stands above and beyond the earthly powers of men, and also a reminder that even those who do not share the Jewish faith or traditions are drawn to Jesus as worthy of adoration. For me personally, it is a reminder that we are all called to follow, to find our own stars of hope and expectation.

In these days of restricted travel and gathering, it makes sense to look for stars to follow that do not require a physical journey like the one undertaken by the wise ones. Our star of hope can lead us to God's love revealed, or to an encounter with the divine, or encourage us to share God's light with others. Our guiding light could be a person – like the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, or Canadian indigenous lawyer and activist Terri-Lynn Williams-Davidson, or in leaders like Teresa Tam or Bonnie Henry. We could find light and inspiration in local organizations seeking to do good in our world and our community – the Mississauga Food Bank, Heart House Hospice, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority.

I believe the important act of faith for us is to keep looking for those stars that can guide us, that can lead us and encourage us in our journeys. Signs of God's presence are here, just as they were for those wandering wise ones. They may not be as obvious as a star in the sky, but they can speak to us, draw us to wonder and adoration, and fill our lives with light. Amen