

## 01-12-2025 Worship Service

### 2025-01-12 Words of Worship and Communion

**Welcome** – Good morning! And welcome to this postponed Epiphany service.

- Since the magi traveled a long distance and for a long time as they followed the light to find Jesus, we figured maybe it would be all right to just postpone it for a week.

- Thank you to Tina Schrag and to the Upper Room Sunday school class for y'all's willingness to leave the beautiful decorations for this extra week.

- And while I'm thanking people, I also want to thank Eric, Bryant, Megan, Janice and Justine for their willingness to be called on at the last moment to deliver a lovely worship service two Sundays ago. My son-in-law, Eric Crawford (married to our middle daughter, Madeline – they live in Wichita) had several surgical procedures that had some complications, so, as a family, we were pretty focused on his well-being. He's recuperating and improving now and we're grateful and would continue to appreciate your prayers on his behalf.

- It was strange and unpredictable that both Luann's family and mine would be having so much illness and health crisis at the same time! And her family's grief and stress isn't over yet! They left Thursday morning to drive to Plain City, Ohio to be at funeral of Luann's sister's son who died of complications from muscular dystrophy this past week. We will certainly continue to pray for Luann and Robert and their family too.

- Now... on to some lighter topics! It's a beautiful, wet, sunshiny morning – we're grateful for the moisture and it is GOOD to be gathered here together to worship God and fellowship with one another; **what announcements or prayers do you have to share?**

Let's read together our **Call to Worship** – which includes the opening prayer.  
It was written by Walter Brueggemann.

**Hieberts light the candles** and do their reading

**Children's Story** – Delbert

**Gathering Hymns** – VT 270 and 265 – *In the Beginning; Angels, from the Realms of Glory*

**Morning Prayer** – Before we pray, I want to let you know that Evelyn Matz died yesterday morning at Bethesda. Evelyn is a sister to Merlin Hiebert and DeLora Funk. Plans are in process for a memorial service for Evelyn here, at AMC. We'll keep you posted as those plans unfold. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for the love and the mercy that you show to all of your creation. You created and you pronounced it good. We can see your goodness and your love in the complexity of humanity, the tender balance and interdependence of ecosystems, the breathtaking beauty and mystery of the stars and the universe. We can see your goodness and your love in the ways our bodies and our minds can heal from illness or injury, in the love and care of friends and family, in the resiliency and persistence of the earth to survive and regenerate.

We pray fervently, O God, for your peace to come on this earth. For all leaders everywhere to be called into your Light, challenged by your Love and convicted by your ways of Justice and Righteousness. We pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace would be the one whose model they would follow, the example they would look to for wisdom and guidance.

God, as we watch with horror the damage being done by fires in California, we pray for your love and mercy to be felt by those who've experienced unimaginable losses – of loved ones, of property, of home and a sense of security. We pray for those who are responding and offering themselves to try to help. For firefighters, medical personnel, community leaders, neighbors helping neighbors... grant your strength and wisdom to those who are offering their help.

We thank you, God, for the safe arrival of baby Evelyn Grace to Brianna and Preston and Silas. Be with them and their families as they learn to know Evie and welcome this sweet new blessing into their hearts and home.

We thank you for the healing that Eric Crawford has experienced and we ask, God, for continued healing and for patience with the process.

O God, we pray for Luann and Robert and their family as they gather to grieve and remember and celebrate the life of Alan. Be especially with Luann's sister and her family as they process this loss. We pray also for safe travels back to KS for Luann and Robert and for extended family as they're traveling back to their homes.

We pray for the family of Evelyn Hiebert Matz, her four children and grandchildren and for Merlin and DaLora. Give them your comfort as they grieve her loss and remember her well. We thank you, God, for her long and faithful life.

We pray for Margie Young and her family as they remember the life of Wilbur's sister, Aline. Grant them comfort in this loss.

Be with us now, God, through the rest of this worship service. Bless our time here. Move among us and through us that we would embrace your Spirit and reflect your Light. Give us wisdom and direction and courage to seek you, to follow you, to be your light in this world. Amen.

**Worship Music** – Juliann and Jerod

### **Offering**

#### **Prayer of Dedication** – VT 1024

Leader: There is no scarcity. There is no shortage.  
 No lack of love, of compassion, of joy in the world.  
 There is enough. There is more than enough.  
 Only fear and greed make us think otherwise.  
 No one need starve.

**People: There is enough land and enough food.**

Leader: No one need die of thirst.

**People: There is enough water.**

Leader: No one need live without mercy.

**People: There is no end to grace.**

Leader: And we are all instruments of grace.

**People: The more we give it, the more we share it,  
 the more we use it, the more God makes.**

Leader: There is no scarcity of love.

## Prayer of Blessing/Commissioning for Search Committee

**OT Reading** – Isaiah 60:1-6

**New Testament Reading** – Matthew 2:1-12

**Message** – Pastor Lois Harder

### 2025-01-05 (or 12) – Epiphany **The darkness is real but the Light is stronger**

We've all had an epiphany, understood broadly. As Wikipedia tells us an epiphany is “an experience of a sudden and striking realization”... “a moment when you suddenly feel that you understand, or suddenly become conscious of, something that is very important to you. A powerful religious experience”.

I'd love to hear what some of your epiphanies have been; meanwhile, I'll share a couple of mine. First, a light-hearted one from my childhood; in about the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (or so) I realized that I *could* memorize multiplication tables – and a lot of other things – if I just put them to a tune. That changed so much for me! It was like a powerful, religious experience that was very important – it changed my whole experience of school! Here's another example. I had an epiphany in 1985 when I went to Nicaragua with an organization called “Witness for Peace”. Our assignment was to travel the country for 3 weeks, the first couple of days in Managua, the capital city, but after that, we were out in the campo, the countryside where poverty was rampant and the Sandanista revolution was in full swing. We were there to listen. Listen to the people's stories and experiences. To listen without judgment, without suggestions, without any hint of trying to “be helpful”. We were to just listen – carefully. And then, we were to return home and share what we heard as broadly as we could, the point being, to try to help people *here* understand better the situation *there* – from the perspective of the people. This epiphany wasn't sudden for me. It started as I was listening, and it got stronger in the months that followed as I was sharing some of the stories. I realized that my own absolute and unquestioning commitment to nonviolence was actually, ironically quite militant, strident and naïve. I learned that I could be a witness for peace but not a witness for absolute, unwavering nonviolence since I had never walked in their shoes. I hadn't experienced the kind of oppression and fear and injustice that those folks had. That epiphany has continued to significantly shape me and challenge me in my faith journey.

An Epiphany isn't always a sudden, “light bulb” sort of idea that comes to us quickly, and changes our life – although it can be. But like many other aspects of faith, an epiphany can often be a process that unfolds over time. In our Biblical texts this morning there are both kinds of epiphanies – a sudden, clear understanding like when the Magi realized the significance of their visit to Jesus – and why they needed to go home by another way. And there are also epiphanies in our stories that are still unfolding... hundreds of years later. If there are connections to be drawn between the epiphanies described in Isaiah and those described in Matthew, they took about 600 years to be realized – if they are, actually, realized yet.

Jerusalem was in a very dark place in both settings. Isaiah was prophesying to a people who'd been beaten down, captured, enslaved, oppressed, exiled. The city itself had been destroyed and

wracked with grief. The Babylonians had done their worst. But then, starting back in chapter 40, the prophet began to imagine something new – something hopeful. “Comfort, comfort my people... speak tenderly to Jerusalem.” Then in chapter 51 we read, “Rouse yourself! Wake up! Stand up! Shake the dust off!” Then in chapter 60 we have these imperatives. These are not suggestions – they are demands. “Arise! Shine!” The days when darkness covered the earth and left people groping... for a way forward have ended. The light of God has come, and that light, the shimmering radiance of *God’s* glory... is for you! But *you* are not the source of this light, Jerusalem. And it’s not only for you! This is God’s light – shining *through* you for all the world, you are to be a light to ALL nations! You’re not better or special or different. The light of God shines on whom it will. This is grace. Grace has shined this light on you and now you must Arise! And Shine!

“Lift up your eyes and look around.” You were dying and you thought God had forsaken you. But now, look UP and see what God is doing! “Sons and daughters are coming from far away – those who had been forcibly removed from their mothers and fathers are on their way back. And coming with them is the wealth of nations. This wealth is not for the purpose of enriching you, Jerusalem, although it might. The purpose of the coming of this wealth into the city from all over the world is to glorify God. The exiles are returning, yes! But along with them come foreigners bringing their labor, their children, their cultures... their gifts... What an epiphany!

The prophet talks about God’s intention to “bring forth justice to the nations” in chapter 42:1, about God’s salvation extending to “the ends of the earth” in chapter 45:22, about God’s “covenant of peace” being for all people in chapter 54:10. The prophet talks about extending God’s promise to “nations that do not know” Israel’s God in chapter 55:5 and to “foreigners” who do know, but fear they won’t be included in God’s purposes in chapter 56:3-4, 6.” Over and over the prophet says, God’s love is for EVERYONE! Some of God’s people still haven’t realized and embrace that.

Six hundred years later, “in the time of King Herod”, there were different foreigners – this time it was astrologers from the East that came to Jerusalem, again, following the radiance of Israel’s God and wondering whether there was a place for them to be accepted and to offer their gifts. They had no “birthright”, no shared heritage or culture. But they were genuine in their search. They were wise and curious and committed to being in the presence of the Light.

I wonder if they realized the depth of darkness that they were riding into when they entered Herod’s domain. They just asked for directions. But that simple request triggered fear. The king was afraid, threatened, fearful of losing his power. And when the king is afraid, lots of people are afraid. Matthew tells us that Herod was frightened and all of Jerusalem with him. That kind of fear can lead to secret plots, lies, and even to the wide-spread murder of innocent children. Fear like that can make it impossible to look up, to see or follow the Light. It can make the average citizen divert their eyes, keep their heads down and their mouths shut.

But the Magi weren’t from Jerusalem; they likely didn’t feel the fear of Herod in the same way as those who lived under Herod’s rule. He didn’t hold the same power or sway over the Magi, so they would have had a different perspective, maybe a depth of wisdom and an openness to the dream that advised them to choose a different way home. Sometimes we might be surprised

about who has epiphanies that later become epiphanies for us. Maybe when we're in the midst of fearful, dark times we could be led to The Light by the very people we've been told are our enemies? By those who are different than us? By those whose experiences offer other perspectives?

The Magi responded to Herod's fear with a beautiful example of nonviolent resistance. They didn't confront him or question his motives. They just quietly and courageously disobeyed him. They refused to be complicit in his scheme and by not cooperating, they gently but clearly undermined his power.

The story of the Magi and the celebration of Epiphany could be the antidote for any temptation we may be feeling after the let down of Christmas to slip into a dark place of hopelessness and fear. Because of the Magi we can remember that the darkness is real. But the Light is stronger.

Resources:

*The Magi: Nonviolent Heroes of the Nativity Story* by Sami Awad, Co-Director of Nonviolence International

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzQXKqpDJHSxqNGfwtwKpVmNPSWT>

David Brooks, Opinion Columnist for the New York Times, *The Shock of Faith: It's Nothing Like I Thought It Would Be*, December 19, 2024

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzQXKqsgBQzkCvtvsQQZndMdbqiq?projector=1&messagePartId=0.2>

Feasting on the Word

**Song of Response** – VT 273, *Arise, Your Light is Come!*

## COMMUNION

As we come this morning to receive the bread and the cup, we remember Jesus and the last meal he had together with his disciples. We remember that He is The Light of the World, the Light that shines for ALL nations and all peoples.

This table is open to all who know and love Jesus and who want to follow him.

I invite the deacons to come and join me.

As Jared plays please come forward using the center aisle, open your hands to receive the bread and then go down either side aisle to receive the cup. Please eat the bread and drink the cup as they're served to you, here in the front, and then return to your seats down the side aisles. There's a small basket for your cups. After you drink the juice just put your cup right into the basket. There's no reason to hurry through this process. We can take our time, be thoughtful and deliberate about what we're doing. Let's pray.

O God, your love brought galaxies into being, summoned water and sky, earth and all creatures, and made us in your image. Through the ages you have cared for all you created. When we wandered, you called us to return to you. In the fullness of time, you sent us the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to teach the law of love. He lived what he taught and loved his enemies to the end. In wonder, we remember the life Jesus lived, laid down, and took up again for us. Send your Spirit upon us so that the bread we break and the cup we share may be the communion of the body of Christ. Send your Spirit upon us so that we can live, like Christ, who taught us to pray... Our Father, who art in heaven...

As Jesus was sitting at the table with his friends, he took the bread, broke it, gave thanks for it and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Whenever you eat it, remember me." Loving God, we thank you for the bread of life made known to us through your servant Jesus and as we eat it, we will remember the love that you have for the whole world.

And we also remember that after supper Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant with God made possible by my death. Whenever you drink this cup, remember me."

We give you thanks, loving God, for sending Jesus to us – to show us what sacrificial love looks like as he died on the cross and rose again on the third day. As we drink the cup we will remember the covenant we have with you, God, with one another, with every living creature on the earth and with the earth itself. (come forward)

Please raise your hand to let the deacons know if you haven't been served yet.

Deacons, you may return now to the front (Bring the bread baskets and cup trays to the front; I stack it all back on the stage, then I serve each deacon a piece of bread. Eat it right away. Justine serves me last. Same with the cup.)

O God, with deep gratitude we thank you for this moment, this meal, this congregation and for your children everywhere. Having tasted your goodness, let us share your Light and your Peace. Send us out, to live as your people, ordinary people that you have called to follow you, to share your love, to live for you as people of this earth and citizens of your kingdom. Amen.

**Song of Sending** – VT 277 *As with Gladness*

**Benediction** – VT 1064

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flock,  
the work of Christmas begins.

**To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among people, to make music in the heart.**