

January 10, 2020 – At-Home/Email Worship

A blessed new calendar year to you, and welcome to worship for our first Sunday after Epiphany ☺ In the course of the past week, on my daily walks, I saw Christmas trees put to the curb, and the “12 days of Christmas” came to an end on the day of Epiphany, January 6th, when we celebrate the journey of the Magi or wise men, and the appearance or manifestation of Jesus to the wider political and religious world, due to the astrologers who come riding into Jerusalem, supposedly on camels, looking for the king of the Jews who has been born – an event they have become aware of because they see a particular star in the heavens. In an interesting coincidence of events, this January 6th also marked the day of transition of leadership in the USA – an event whose political realities bear eerie commonality to the Magi story ... which we will look at more in the message today.

January 6th marks the beginning of the season we call Epiphany, which leads us right up to Lent, beginning on February 17th of this year with Ash Wednesday. We may not be able to have the usual imposition of ashes on that day, but a clever alternative has been figured out, so stay tuned for how your ashes might be mailed to you for self-application when that time comes ☺

Our November 2020 Lamplighter indicated an in-person Annual General Meeting (AGM) tentatively scheduled for January 31st, in the sanctuary following worship. With our current provincial lockdown, and currently rising and very high levels of COVID infections, council decided at their meeting on Wednesday night to once again postpone our AGM, until March 21st 2020. This postponement is done in the hope that in-person gathering may be possible again by that time, but provisions will also be made and communicated to active members of our congregation (those who have been received into the congregation by transfer, baptism, affirmation of baptism or special council vote, AND have either received communion OR made an offering of note in the previous year) regarding the process for this AGM, along with the bulletin of reports – so stay tuned for that too ☺

This Sunday, your worship service is available to you:

- in print copy (if you prefer to receive it this way, please call Bonnie Scott at the church office, 519-653-4721), **PLEASE NOTE, in 2021, the print copy will arrive in the week following the Sunday service, as this allows me to better focus on pastoral care duties during each week.**
- As an online service you can go through at your leisure, with music links provided via our St Peter's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdxKUbGybZj4PN_R36KPeiw/videos), or
- As a live, gathering of people for worship on the Zoom video/audio conferencing platform.

We are still experimenting on Heide's Zoom service for live online worship. This allows us to gather together for worship from our respective homes. We want to ensure this is the best package for our use before the church invests in our own Zoom subscription. **You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of the Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply):**

1 587 328 1099 or
1 647 374 4685 or
1 647 558 0588 or
1 778 907 2071 or
1 204 272 7920 or
1 438 809 7799

Use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked.

**Heide Emrich is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting for Sunday Worship
Sunday, January 10, 2021 10:00 AM.**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89581364052?pwd=Tk4vUXQxd3NGeklvSkdTao5rUWN3QT09>

Meeting ID: 895 8136 4052 and Passcode: 169810

With the provincial lockdown, in-home visits are being avoided. If you need a phone or video call, doorway or distanced outdoor visit, please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721 ... The church office is closed, but walking visits, brief front porch/screen door visits, video phone

visits or regular phone visits remain available ☺ Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if I may be of help or support in these times!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

A Word from Lorre:

I want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who has generously allowed the use of your photographs in the making of our videos for use in our online worship services. I will still take any scenery photos you'd like to send along to be included in future videos. Full credit will of course be given. And also I want to thank everyone who has sent words of appreciation for the efforts of Brad and his guest singers to make our worship the best it can be. We have all learned quite a few new tech skills throughout 2020 and each video gets better than the ones that came before. Thank you for bearing with us and for your words of encouragement. God bless you all during this holy season. —Lorre Calder

Click for land acknowledgement:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,
centre yourself for worship.

Gathering Hymn: Bright and Glorious is the Sky ELW 301

(Bradley Moggach Piano & Vocal)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQM57bjKeLo&feature=youtu.be>

Text: Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, Tr: Jens Christian Aaberg; Tune: Danish, (Dejlig Er Den Himme Blå); Contributors: Service Book and Hymnal; Text: © 1958, Augsburg Fortress; All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A727610

Greeting:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: Holy God, Creator of all life and light, your glory shines from east to west, from north to south, so that all people may see and be radiant. So that every heart may be uplifted and give thanks that hope and love persist through all darkness. Guide us with the light of Jesus. Overwhelm us with the joy of your presence. May we enter into your place of earthly breaking in, encountering the lowly, confident of your saving presence in Jesus. Amen.

The Lesson: Ephesians 3:4-6, 11-12, 20

As you read over what I have written to you, you'll be able to see for yourselves into the mystery of Christ. None of our ancestors understood this. Only in our time has it been made clear by God's Spirit through his holy apostles and prophets of this new order. The mystery is that people who have never heard of God and those who have heard of him all their lives (what I've been calling outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.

All this is proceeding along lines planned all along by God and then executed in Christ Jesus. When we trust in him, we're free to say whatever needs to be said, bold to go wherever we need to go.

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us. (The Message Translation)

Word of God, word of life. C: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation: Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child ELW #297

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59JIsulUmcl>

Text African American Traditional; Music African American Traditional; Contributor: Jeffrey Radford; arr. Bradley Moggach
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The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 2:1-12

C: Glory to you O Lord.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd^[d] my people Israel.’”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. (NRSV)

C: Praise to you, O Christ.*

Sermon:

(For email only people, an audio link for the sermon will be posted on YouTube following our Zoom worship gathering on Sunday – watch for that email ☺)

Most of you probably have a young person in your life who went through that toddler stage of wanting to hear a bed-time story read over and over again. With my niece, I think that storybook was Goodnight Moon, and perhaps part of the comfort of the repetition came from hearing a story being read to which the outcome was already known.

Today’s gospel reading tells of the wise men who come to look for Jesus, because a star has told them of his arrival, or more specifically, of the arrival of a child who is born the Messiah, king of the people of God. Herod features in today’s reading, but it is not until later in the gospel of Matthew chapter two, that we hear of Herod’s violent action to try and kill the baby/toddler Messiah “he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men” ...

Poinsettias are a common plant in our Advent and Christmas season, and in Jamaica, poinsettias are perennials, planted often as hedges. At Christmas time and into the early part of the new year they turn red, colouring hedges with their brilliance ...

and I remember as a child being told this turn of red on this plant is to mark the blood of the children who were killed under Herod’s leadership, in his attempt to try and destroy the king or leader of God’s people, of whom he had learnt from the wise men. Sometimes, knowing where the story ends allows us to hear a small portion of it differently than when we do not know the ending ... and in that listening we might miss out on some of the details in the part of the story we are actually listening to! Today I want us to look at the details with different eyes ... eyes that do not presume to know the ending to the story.

So the “wise men from the east”, whom Bible scholars variously identify as astrologers or kings from the far east, apparently notice a star in the sky, an unusual star, and they know it to signify the birth of the king of “the Jews” or the people of God ... and of course they want to see this king. But it seems they need some direction. The star itself does not lead them directly to Jesus at first. So they travel into Jerusalem and seek out the King Herod, asking (perhaps quite innocently) where is this King who we know has been born because we saw the star. Christmas cards and drawings usually depict them traveling on camels.

It was common in that time for the King to access all manner of people for direction: astrologers were in that list, and so were religious leaders (scribes and chief priests). So when one set of people you would look to for direction show up saying something important has happened, and the important thing threatens your leadership, it makes sense that you would call on the other set of people who normally would guide you, to give you some lead.

The scribes and chief priests are therefore summoned ... not out of excitement or eager anticipation to go and see this newborn leader, but the gospel says "King Herod was frightened, and all of Jerusalem with him." This is not an eager person looking forward to the end of a well-known story. This is a leader fearful that his own leadership and the world order as he knows it being afraid. Not only the leader, but the people of the land he leads.

Does any of this sound familiar based on what we heard in the news on the day of Epiphany? When angry crowds storm the Capitol and invade the senate house to challenge the transfer of leadership in the USA?

King Herod summons the priests and scribes, and they cite the scriptures, saying (in modern GPS language) turn left at Bethlehem, as it is written. One would imagine that if these chief priests were citing scripture to locate the newborn leader, and *actually believed* that this was the newborn leader, they would have saddled up their own camels and said "come let's go look for him together, because we are pretty excited about this incredible thing too."

But they aren't.

Perhaps it is because, as interpreters of the Word of God, they have interpreted astrologers as being basically untrustworthy, so I almost imagine a scornful, GPS lady telling you to recalculate your direction tone of voice ... they don't trust these wise guys, and they are not interested in doing anything but the bare minimum to satisfy King Herod's enquiry.

I feel like they brush their hands of this astrology nonsense after citing the scripture, and probably mutter to each other on their way back to their quarters "who do those wise guys think they are anyway, riding in on their camels talking about a king of the Jews. If there was a king of the Jews being born we would have, for sure, got the memo before them!"

For it is not unusual for those of us who are of a tradition to presume we know better than those who are not of our tradition ...

The scribes and chief priests might readily toss off the wise men, but King Herod does not (like many leaders, he takes advice from a variety of sources, and he fears greatly that IF these wise guys are on to something, his leadership will be threatened). So he calls the wise men back, and finds out from them exactly when that star had shown up ... and we know (because we have the benefit of knowing the end story), that Herod uses this information to cast a wide net of which children to kill. He does the math backwards ... if they saw the star on x night, at what-o'clock, the baby should be this many days or weeks old ... but to cover all bases let's just terminate all children two years old or less.

Who does something like that? The whole thing is really quite disturbing.

King Herod, after sussing out time of star, then sends the wise guys on to Bethlehem, claiming that he too wants to go and pay homage, or give gifts and pay respects to this newborn leader, so he says, when you find him, come let me know where he's at.

The wise guys are not named as wise guys for no reason. They go, hey, wait a minute! There is something fishy going on here. And as they head to Bethlehem, that star appears again and this time it's in full GPS mode, no scribes and chief priests required, and it leads them right to the baby. They give of their most precious things, they part with what they most adore, in order to demonstrate and express their adoration of this baby leader who they find in the most humble of circumstances, a feed trough in a stable, with a peasant mom and dad tending to him. King of the Jews indeed.

And, having cottoned on to King Herod's wily ill-will, rather than following his command to come back and disclose the location of the baby leader, they return to their own homes by another route.

What a story. So many good, rich components that we saw play out this week: risk to leadership, fear, the calling in of people ... and we also see the wisdom in returning to following the heavenly signs, trusting in that which nature provides to guide ... we see the wise men leave all the fear and anxiety behind, and focus their attentions and precious offerings directly on the baby leader.

I keep saying baby leader because to it is vitally important to truly understand that these wise men, and King Herod all understood that this infant was a leader (and a significant threat to other leaders).

Also of vital importance is the willingness of the wise men to observe a sign, and to follow it, to follow it to where leadership is, but then to return to trusting a divine GPS system that is not man-made, to lead them to where they need and want to go.

So it was that in this past week, when all hell was breaking loose in Washington DC, and I was delivering Rosina's lovely soup, at every doorway where I heard the anxious, disgusted, fearful reports of riots on Capitol Hill.

This is the day of Epiphany I thought ... when we become aware of Jesus, manifested ... so I repeatedly reminded people to re-focus their energies, their hearts and their minds on the good news of Jesus, the nourishment provided by the season of Epiphany and Rosina's homemade soup – for there are always good and hopeful things, uplifting and life giving things to which we can cast our eyes.

When we are diligent in choosing where to look, we will come to see God's leadership manifested before our very eyes – the meaning of Epiphany. It is a choice ... we choose where to look, and which directions to follow.

Thus, during lockdown, in the midst of whatever bad news assaults you this Epiphany season, keep your focus on the light that leads and guides us, the light of Jesus, the love of God, the life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn of Day:

We Three Kings, Bradley Moggach, Piano, Improvisation by Bradley Moggach

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTCW4Cboi_8

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**** Prayers of the People**

As we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus, to all people in this time after Epiphany, let us pray for the needs in our world, responding to the call: God who provides all, with hear our prayer.

Gracious and Holy God, your eternal purposes revealed in Jesus demonstrate your love extends to the ends of the earth, far beyond our capacity to imagine. We give thanks for your expansive love, and for the abundant ways in which you make yourself known to us.

We pray for all who believe in you,
Too often afraid of the rich diversity you have designed,
Too often timid in our proclamation of the good news of your love-example, before the rulers and powers of this world.

Strengthen our witness, our voices, hearts and minds.

Fill us with Divine Spirit, that we may be bold and courageous, to live our witness of faith in Jesus.

God who provides all, *hear our prayer.*

Heal divisions in our world of knowledge, belief and power,
So that your world may know the unity of love, sharing in the promises of Jesus,
Knowing the peace those promises provide.

God who provides ALL, *hear our prayer.*

We pray for those who are struggling in and with darkness,
Darkness of health, of soul, of mind, of spirit.
We call upon your power to make apparent and manifest the knowledge of Jesus,
The light which darkness cannot overcome.

God who provides ALL, *hear our prayer.*

We pray for those who have little power according to the world's measure of power.
 Guide us to be your defense in the cause of the poor, according to your will;
 Guide us to be your hands and feet in deliverance of those in need, in ending oppression, according to your will.
 Bring your healing to those in need, your comfort to those who are hurting. Show us how to help.
God who provides ALL, *hear our prayer.*

Help us to be your light that makes Jesus manifest in our world. Show us the way, we pray, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Let us share the peace of Christ:

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation.

Meal:

Click here if you are accessing YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0YEYAO080U>

I invite you to prepare your table with bread and wine, or crackers and juice, whatever is available to you, so that you may participate in the meal. All are welcome. I also would like to teach you some gestures as we begin so that we can participate physically in the dialogue.

****Prayer after Communion.**

Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of God shines on you.
 Get up: shake off apathy, despair and all that brings you low.
 GLOW: show God's light and love,
 so that others may know Jesus who is in you,
 and shines from within you.
 Amen.

Sending Hymn: Goodness is Stronger than Evil #721

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4u7jaS1uv4&t>

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Blessing: (Janaki)

May the love of God uphold you;
 the light of Christ guide you;
 and the fellowship of Spirit fill you with joy,
 now and forever.
 Amen.

Dismissal: Go with Jesus, shining Christ light into the world. ***Thanks be to God.***

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