

First Congregational United Church of Christ

*Empowered by the Holy Spirit and with the help of God,
we open our doors and hearts to all, in service and love as modeled by Jesus Christ.*

An Open and Affirming Congregation



*Second Sunday after Christmas Day
A Celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord
The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles*

The Lord's Day
Second Sunday after Christmas Day
A Celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord
The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles
Nine o'clock in the Morning

The Worship of God

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by God's holiness; the nourishment of the mind with God's truth; the purifying of the imagination by God's beauty; the opening of the heart to God's love; the surrender of the will to God's purpose—all of this gathered up in adoration.

~William Temple

The Prologue

According to the Gregorian calendar, Jesus was born in 4 CE, formerly called 4 AD, the same year that the egomaniacal Herod the Great died. What a contrast! What an interesting irony is found as we consider this birth described as a holy gift from God and a death that in many respects no doubt would have been described as a great relief to those who had been dutifully oppressed under the wicked reign of this power-driven ruler who had sworn allegiance to Rome. The dichotomy between Jesus and Herod is both literal and metaphorical! As we live our lives, we are constantly exposed to the brightness of all that reflects the image of the Divine, a prism revealing the unlimited spectrum of color imaging all that is good in creation, divine perfection juxtaposed against the grim darkness that seeks to devour and ensnare, to consume and overwhelm, seeking to not only diminish but to destroy the creative spark that inspires human initiative. And yet, darkness ironically beholds its own beauty, unfurling its own revelatory capacity, allowing a crystal clarity that enables the stars to shine, to guide all of us as we seek to follow the north star of divine love on whatever pathway, to wherever the Holy leads.

Gathering Music

The Call to Worship and Welcome

The Spirit of the still speaking God be with you.

And also with you!

The Music for Contemplation

The Lighting of the Altar Candles

The Gathering

Arise, shine! Come and worship the One whose light has come into the world, the glory of the Holy One risen among us, epiphanies appearing to all people everywhere!

Gathering to offer our gifts in worship, we are awakened to the Spirit of God, enlivened by the greatest mystery, all humanity blessed with holy presence!

We lift up our eyes to the Holy One, our hearts rejoicing with radiant hope as we long for justice to water the earth like a shower, the righteousness and peace of God abounding!

The transcendent light of God shines brightly upon us today as we receive the promises of the riches of Christ, delighting in the mystery of Epiphany!

Let us worship God!

The Choral Introit

You Are the Light

Ken Bible and Tom Fettke

Treble Ensemble

The Collect

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of the brightest stars, whose guidance is always available to those who intuitively look and listen, speak to us now in this sacred time and space, your Spirit breaking into our thoughts, revealing in our hearts the great joy that comes from living; God of all epiphanies, empower us to worship you with all our being as we offer to you our best gifts this day; like the wise men of old, those magical, mystical, magi who traveled to pay homage to the Christ Child, we would be honored, humbled to lead others to the discoveries waiting in every journey of faith, all pathways leading to you; all this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the holy and still speaking Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

*The Opening Hymn, No. 173

As with Gladness

DIX

*The Litany of Praise

God longs to crush all evil, vanquishing the darkness that overshadows the light, the Holy One defending the cause of all who are oppressed!

The Holy One comes bearing justice, equity, and righteousness to all humanity, always sensitive to the needs of the poor, all who live on the fringes of our global society!

From generation to generation, the righteousness of God flourishes, the grace of God like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!

The Holy One brings divine peace, a peacefulness that abounds throughout the world, a peace that will last until the moon ceases to shine upon the earth!

In praise and thanksgiving, we lay our tributes before the Holy, our gifts we gladly bring before the God of all nations, the One we seek to serve with all our hearts and minds!

In joyous gratitude, we bow before our helper, the One who saves us, redeeming our lives, all humanity made in the divine image, precious in the sight of God! Praise the Lord!

*The Gloria

GREATOREX

Glory to the Creator, and to the Christ, and to the Comforter!

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,

World without end! Amen! Amen!

The Call to Confession¹

Come, all who have missed or ignored the revelation God places before us. The stars still brightly shine!
Come, all who have dwelled in the shadows, every nation gathering before the brightness that shines through Christ. Confess now all that separates you from the intents and purposes that God has for you, all that divides you from your sisters and brothers. Come to know the wholeness of God given you in Christ Jesus. In the sacred silence and stillness of our moments together, let us confess before the Holy.

The Silent Confession

The Corporate Confession²

Let us pray to the Lord,

God of all epiphanies, our senses are frequently dulled to the radiance of your light and the justice of your ways. Free us from the oppression of selfishness and the tyranny of greed that threatens to diminish our humanity. Attune us to your revelation, that we may partake of your promises in Christ Jesus.

The Assurance of Pardon³

Beloved faith community, hear the good news of the Second Sunday after Christmas Day, this celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord. Arise, shine, for your light has come! The glory of God has risen upon us and will be seen through all our faithful works. Be radiant in your praise and service, rejoicing in the gift of the loving grace of God. Witness with confidence your faith in Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God!

The Time for the Children

Lori Hunter

The Witness from the Hebrew Bible

ISAIAH 60:1-6

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you! For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the LORD will arise upon you, and God's glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around! They all gather together! They come to you! Your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried in their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant! Your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you. The wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah. All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD!

Listen to what the Spirit of the still speaking God is saying!

Thanks be to God!

The Response, PSALM 72:1-7, 10-14

CAROL

*O God, your judgments give the King, a son your righteousness!
With right he shall your people judge, your poor with uprightness!
And then the mountains shall bring forth to all the people peace!
The hills because of righteousness their blessing shall increase!*

*The lowly poor ones shall be blessed, the needy children bless!
 And he will break in pieces those who would the poor oppress!
 The just shall flourish in his days and prosper in his reign!
 And while the moon endures he shall abundant peace maintain!
 His large and great dominion shall from sea to sea extend!
 And from these boundaries shall reach forth to earth's remotest end!
 Yea, kings shall all before him bow, all nations shall obey!
 He'll save the needy when they cry, the poor who have no stay!
 Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel,
 For God alone does wondrous works in glory that excel!
 And blessed be God's glorious name to all eternity!
 The whole earth let God's glory fill! Amen so let it be!*

The Witness from the Gospels

MATTHEW 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east 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 my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the magi 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 in the east, 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.

The Gospel for today!

Thanks be to God!

The Sermon *Running from the Dark! Running to the Light!*

Timothy W. Shirley

The Hymn for Epiphany, No. 172 *We Three Kings*

KINGS OF ORIENT

(refrain, verses 1 and 5 only)

The Service of Holy Communion

*Individually wrapped gluten-free bread is
 available in the center bowl of each bread plate.*

The Concerns of the Church

The Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

**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.**

The Receiving of Our Gifts

The Offertory

*The Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise Christ all creatures here below!
Praise Holy Spirit, evermore!
Praise triune God whom we adore!*

*The Prayer of Thanksgiving

*The Closing Hymn, No. 174 *Brightest and Best*

STAR IN THE EAST

*The Extinguishing of the Altar Candles

*The Procession of the Light

*The Benediction and Blessing

To our guests! At your choosing, we invite you to join us in a long-standing tradition at First Congregational United Church of Christ as we form a circle, joining hands and singing together our Fellowship Song.

*The Fellowship Song

Let There Be Peace on Earth

WORLD PEACE

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.
With every step I take, let this be my joyous creed.
To take each moment and live each moment in peace, eternally!
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

The Music for Reflection

*You are invited to stand as you are able.

Lector: Bill Marshall

Ushers: Kamie Kolb and Susan Krivichi

*The color for Christmastide, the twelve days beginning on Christmas Day,
and Epiphany of Our Lord, is white, a color symbolizing purity and victory.*

***The flowers adorning the Chancel for worship this morning are given by
Barb Flaherty wishing our church a very Happy New Year.***

Worship Notes:

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The Epiphany of Our Lord, AKA The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, is a non-movable feast day always observed on January 6. This high and holy festival day celebrates the visitation of the Wise Men to the young Jesus. AKA Theophany or Three Kings' Day, Epiphany is one of the principal and oldest festival days of the Christian Church. Older than Christmas, Epiphany has its origins in paganism, from whence most Christian festivals emerge. Like Christmas, Epiphany is rooted in the ancient rituals associated with the Winter Solstice. Epiphany is Christmas Eve in the Eastern traditions following the Julian calendar! This sacred day reminds Christians everywhere of Christ's "extravagant welcome," expansive inclusion, open invitation, and radical hospitality, the love of God poured out upon the whole world!⁴

What we know about the infamous wise men of old is that we know absolutely nothing, or at the least, next to nothing! This threesome is shrouded in ultimate mystery, magically disappearing from the scene as quickly as they appear, an art imitating life epiphany! The best testament we can afford them is that they were of gentile origin and were some kind of astrologers, soothsayers, mystics of some variety. Perhaps they were sorcerers, magicians? Who knows? Some scholars have suggested they were Zoroastrians, followers of the god named Ahura Mazda. Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest religions. No, the child, Jesus, did not try to convert them! This trio, a trifacta of human trinitarian substance, represent a radical new paradigm springing forth from the old order, traditional Judaism ironically given a new, but very old, twist! These mythic figures are literary reminders of the call of God to all persons, that love of God was and is intended to be extended to everyone. The word "epiphany" means "appearance," a manifestation of revelation quality. Epiphany, as a liturgical celebration, a pivotal part of the Church Year, speaks to the light of God revealed! May it still be so today!

First Congregational United Church of Christ

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First Congregational UCC - Eagle River, WI

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