



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

Sunday Worship Service

January 4, 2026

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Mary Ellen Beans would like to thank you for your cards, calls, gifts and well wishes!
She wishes all the best in the New Year!

Today is our "First Celebration Sunday" with Holy Communion in worship followed by a church brunch. All are welcome to join!

Bible Study will meet this Wednesday (January 7) at 10am.

AA will meet this Wednesday (January 7) at 8pm.

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will be meeting next Sunday (January 11) at 9:15am. We are deciding on our next study, so it is a perfect time to join if interested!

Next Sunday (January 11) is our monthly Friends of the Homeless dinner at 6pm. A sign-up sheet for volunteers is available in the church office. While meal funds are good, considering donating toward our other FOTH efforts (FOTH Operations/Jack's House of Hope).

Next Sunday (January 11) we will start the process of de-decorating our sanctuary from Christmas. Any help would be appreciated!

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Creator, the hopes that we all have for the world are settled in your Son Jesus Christ. His arrival, his work, his presence, his assurance is a sign of that you have prepared something for your creation to enjoy. May the star which announced his presence long ago radiate through us and direct others to see what has happened.

Amen.

Prelude *Lord, I Lift Your Name On High* arr. D Wagner

***Call to Worship (Psalm 72)**

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son; that he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice; that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

Let him defend the needy among the people, rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor. May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another. Let him come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.

In his time may the righteous flourish; and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more. May he rule from sea to sea, and from the river Euphrates to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. May all kings bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.

For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress, the oppressed, and those who have no helper. He has compassion on the lowly and poor, and preserves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, and precious is their blood in his sight.

Long may he live! And may there be given to him gold of Sheba; may prayer be made for him always, and may they bless him all the day long.

May there be an abundance of grain in the land, growing thick even on the hilltops; may its fruit flourish like Lebanon, and may people flourish in cities like the grass of the field.

May the king's name remain forever and be established as long as the sun endures; may all the nations bless themselves in him and call him blessed.

Blessed are you, LORD God, the God of Israel; you alone do wondrous deeds!

And blessed be your glorious name forever, and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen. Amen.

Hymn #56 *The First Nowell

The first Nowell 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.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
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.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

And by the light of that same star,
Three wise came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

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.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then entered in those wise men three,
Full reverently upon the knee,
And offered there, in His presence,
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord;
That hath made Heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood our life hath bought.
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

***Prayer of Confession**

The divine arrival has been announced for all to see and perceive but often is blocked by others based upon ideas of petty worthiness:

LORD, our Creator, the announcement of your Son and renewed life has been given for all to see and enjoy. But we admit that we measure worthiness of it,

place obstacles in other's paths, or silently judge why someone is here. Forgive us our petty judgments and allow us to see the necessity of all your children gathered to learn and live. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

Light illuminates the darkness and uncovers what festers in shadow, but also drives away that which is evil so we might embrace what is good.

Jesus Christ shines as the light of our lives and the hope of the world. By the LORD's help may we kindle and carry it where it is needed.

***Hymn #579 Gloria Patri**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Reading of the Scriptures

All Scripture lessons come from the Revised Common Lectionary. Prescribed lessons are underlined, with pastoral inserts to preserve the integrity of the passage.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Isaiah 60:1-22

60 ¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³ Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴ 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 on their nurses' arms. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house. ⁸ Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? ⁹ For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you. ¹⁰ Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in my wrath I struck you down, but in my favor I have had mercy on you. ¹¹ Your gates shall always be open; day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth, with their kings led in procession. ¹² For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste. ¹³ The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane, and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify where my feet rest. ¹⁴ The descendants of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. ¹⁶ You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breasts of kings; and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. ¹⁷ Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. ¹⁸ Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. ¹⁹ The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. ²⁰ Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. ²¹ Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified. ²² The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.

Ephesians 3:1-13

3 ¹ This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ Of this

gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. ¹³ I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Matthew 2:1-12

² ¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶ '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.'" ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Sermon *Epiphany Sunday*

The season of Christmas traditionally ends with the celebration of the Epiphany, the story of the three wise men traveling from afar to discover the Christ child. Their journey is also symbolic of the journey all the peoples of the world make when discovering the rule and love of the LORD. When the LORD established the people of Israel as his chosen people, it was not because of any sense of superiority or extraordinariness compared to other peoples. Rather, the work the LORD did for Israel could be considered a 'proof of concept' for how that divine rule pulls others together, organizes society, and reminds the world of the common source we all originated through. After centuries, perhaps millennia, of instruction and waiting the arrival of

Jesus Christ met a historical need, only to open those waiting to a greater hope and realization of what the LORD has come to do. Those who were considered gentiles, non-Jews ethnically, saw how these promises from a strange people filtered into and provided a wisdom and hope needed for day to day living. The Epiphany is not celebrating a brand-new wisdom and realization, but the discovery how the already-existing knowledge and hope found renewed meaning for those watching it. Even those who did so from a distance.

The three wise men, the magi, were those who did so from a distance. They were gentile, considered 'outsiders' to the people of Israel, but not strangers to the promised hope of the Hebrew prophets. Starting from the eighth century BC, the time of the Babylonian conquest and exile of Israel, the hopes of Israel had a presence in that area of the far east. Scholars speculated these magi, these court officials to the king and officers of government, traveled from Persia. The prophet Daniel also served as a magi, a court official and advisor to the king, and knowledge of his faith and that of his people would have been recorded in archives. Studied by later officials and scholars, the expectation of the LORD's intervention in human affairs was well known and possibly watched for as a curiosity. To then have a star not previously seen or tracked suddenly appear would have triggered alarm that something was happening which needed to be investigated. Only then to bring these magi into contact with authorities in Jerusalem, conditions within the kingdom of Judea under the Romans, and realize that the divine was starting to reorganize, challenge, and reestablish divine guidance where it has been lost. Even the gifts they brought represented the hopes that this promised king would provide. Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, and myrrh for a doctor and healer. In Jesus, all these meanings are realized.

It is the same with the prophecy mentioned in Isaiah, the promise that Jerusalem and Israel would not remain fallen forever. But there will be a restoration of the city and people, and it would become more glorious than before because the LORD would raise it all up. It will call too and summon all peoples and cause them to come and see. They will bring treasures in celebration, yearn for the wisdom and life found within, and summon creation back together when it had already drifted so far apart. Of course, such a prophecy was nested within a historical reality and then blossomed into a greater hope and expectation for those in need. If the LORD would indeed build up and restore the known "city of peace" (Jerusalem), what would the divine have in mind for the rest of the world in that same manner?

That is what St. Paul strived to do in his ministry, traditionally called a 'ministry to the Gentiles'. Because even in St. Paul's time there was confusion about the role of non-Jews within the Church, those lacking the traditional understanding of Jesus' role and offered salvation. But the apostle knew that their want to know, their eagerness to know and adopt, was a sign that the divine spirit was already at work to bring them in. A greater realization that all peoples were being prepared and welcomed, to once again become a family and meet their purpose as they have been created to do.

Perhaps in different ways, but united in a common purpose and understanding which produced well-being within anyone exposed to it. That is why St. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, a mostly gentile church, not to let anyone distract or take away the hope and realization they have. That the gospel they had, learned about, and organized around was the mystery of the ages. Given first to prophets and those who could handle it at first, then made available to those ready to accept it. The fact that it had been given to them, and accepted, was a sign that the work of the LORD was happening through them. That was the ministry St. Paul strived in and worked so hard for, to see the people of the LORD grow larger and more knowledgeable by what the spirit of Christ encouraged within them. To allow the greater family to become better equipped for eventual challenges by their inclusion. That is a hope St. Paul tells them, tells us all, not to give up and surrender to anyone who claims to know better what the LORD wants. The LORD gives to those who are determined to be ready for it, and accept it as an essential part of humanity and life.

The message of the gospel is about how Jesus Christ has come to reveal divine mystery, expose the problems of sin and evil within us, and offer solution to how these forces have been disarmed so we might live in the best way possible. A message which is as ancient as the rocks we stand on, but also reads so fresh and addresses what is faced today. Epiphany is recognizing that the gospel is there as a universal truth that applies to any person and any situation, and can radically change anything we face when joyfully accepted. Not an instant fix to anything, but a standard to go back to whenever we find struggles in life. It makes us ask what the promises of the LORD mean right now? Where is the opportunity to serve and clarify what we are doing? What are we being made to look forward to beyond the disappointments we come across? These questions, and more, are what the journey of the magi represent. Now that the divine is with us, is present and living with us, how does it now direct us toward what is better and realize what we have lost and found again with the Christ now present?

Celebration of Holy Communion

Let us remember in prayer:

Dominic Aquino, Tom & Amy Aquino, Mary Ellen Beans, Terry Carpenter, Fritz Chambers, Michelle Chamberlain, Mary Jane Dougherty, Don Eberheart Jr., Allison Folly, Kay France, Jamie Frank, Pam Hykes, Judy Hass, Alice & Errol Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, Breanne Mathias, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, Mark Preusser, Stefani Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Marlene Singhaus, Dane & Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Dean & Heidi Unzicker, Simone Villarruel, Holly Waldenmyer, Gene & Ruth Joyce Zimmerly, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

The LORD be with you!

And also with you!

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them up to the LORD!

Let us give thanks to the LORD, our God!

It is right to give our thanks and praise!

God of wisdom and pronouncement, by your will you have announced good news of great joy for all people. Not just people born in a certain place and time, in certain situations and needs, but for all people within your creation. The arrival of your Son, the shining of your glory, has been given to capture the attention of all in this world. A reminder of your control and guidance over all our lives, even without our understanding of it. Your shining star does not just radiate in a specific era of human history, but shines continually because your glory is with us. You have made a home with us, and use us to carry out your will and exemplify your hope to those who need it.

So we praise you for your loving rule, your steadfast guidance and commitment, and your acceptance of all the world even when we might think otherwise. So we might be changed by the hymn sung by the choirs of heaven:

Holy, holy, holy LORD. God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. Hosanna in the highest.

Praise, indeed, to the one who comes in your name. Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God. The one who proves divine love and acceptance, rule and guidance, by how he taught, acted, and exemplified your ways. Who took broken bread, blessed cup, and declared to his disciples, then and now, this is the hope of renewed agreement with the divine. A sign that we are accepted by extraordinary means. For this we give thanks, accept with our whole hearts, and live the mystery of your faith:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

In what we accept here today, LORD, may it perk our attention to that which is more important. You give us what we need to live out our calling and lives, and you also give what is needed to see all around us in a new way. By how you bless and renew our sight, may we see everything with the hope and opportunity given because of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Partaking in the Elements

We thank you, LORD, for what we have received here today. You prove that our daily bread, our daily provision, is met and given by your alone. Our understandings and knowledge are also given by you in just the right place and time. From what we are gifted help us to take away to better and heal the world around us, and fulfill the meaning of your 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.

Offering our Gifts

From all that is given to us by the divine, and by the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ, may we pass on to make hope known and alive!

Offertory *Two Bohemian Carols* arr. B Price

Hymn #592 *Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***Prayer of Dedication**

LORD, our Creator, you give so much to our lives without our asking and make better from what we do ask. May all we give be the hope that others are searching for, so they might become complete and whole by our willingness. **Amen.**

Hymn #69 *O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

O Morning Star, how fair and bright
Thou beamest forth in truth and light!
O Sovereign meek and lowly!
Thou root of Jesse, David's Son,
My Lord and Savior, Thou hast won
My heart to serve Thee solely!
Thou art holy,
Fair and glorious, all victorious,
Rich in blessing,
Rule and might o'er all possessing.

Thou heavenly brightness! Light divine!
O deep within my heart now shine,

And make Thee there an altar!
Fill me with joy and strength to be
Thy member, ever joined to Thee
In love that cannot falter!
Toward Thee longing
Doth possess me; turn and bless me;
Here in sadness
Eye and heart long for Thy gladness!

***Benediction**

Hear now, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; you will love your neighbor as yourself.

With the gospel of Jesus Christ guiding you, go into the world to live this sole purpose.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Postlude Noel Nouvelet Leon Roques**

Be blessed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever you may go!

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