



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

Sunday Worship Service

January 5, 2025

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Today is our monthly church brunch following service- all are welcome and invited!

Bible Study will be this Wednesday (January 8) at 10am.

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

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will meet on Sunday (January 12) at 9:15am.

Next Sunday (January 12) is our monthly Friends of the Homeless Meal at 6pm. A sign-up sheet is in the church office for volunteers to help. While our meal fund is met, please consider donating toward our other Friends of the Homeless efforts (Jack's House of Hope/Friends of the Homeless Operations).

Our Tables of Eight Dinner Group will be meeting again starting January 18 at 6pm. The cost is \$10 per person and RSVP is required- either in the church office, or with Carolyn Berry or Mike Smith.

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Father, the arrival of your Son inspires all peoples to seek you and bring what they have in tribute. By what Jesus inspires in our lives, help us to see the dangers in our midst and work toward their reconciliation with you. **Amen.**

Prelude *Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee* arr. Dykes

***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 #63 *As with Gladness Men of Old

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light,

Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most glorious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to Thee.

As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heaven and earth adore;
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek Thy mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King.

Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past,
Bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide,
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.

***Prayer of Confession**

The LORD reveals all good things, but also reveals the mistakes and wickedness which threatens to undo us. But in prayer let us accept what your light illuminates:

LORD, our Father, we seek your Son and all the good which he brings. But we are unaware of the evils which are revealed by his presence, those we often overlook or ignore. By your light in the world help us to better discern those things which help and hinder. All so we may serve you better than before. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

Though darkness threatens creation, and our lives, the light and dawn has arrived to restore and cleanse us for what lies ahead.

Through Jesus Christ, the promise of baptism, and gift of the Holy Spirit we are inspired to a better way than what surrounds us.

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

60¹Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ²For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. ³Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Lift 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. ⁵Then 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. ⁶A 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. ⁷All 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. ⁸Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows? ⁹For 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. ¹⁰Foreigners 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. ¹¹Your 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. ¹²For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly

laid waste. ¹³The 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. ¹⁴The 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. ¹⁵Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. ¹⁶You 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. ¹⁷Instead 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. ¹⁸Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. God the Glory of Zion ¹⁹The 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. ²⁰Your 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. ²¹Your 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. ²²The 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 3:1-21

³This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In 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: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷Of 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. ⁸Although 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, ⁹and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰so 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. ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. ¹³I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory. ¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to

comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled
with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to
accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the
church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 2:1-23

²In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "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." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶And 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.'" ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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." ⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. ¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." ¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and 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. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more." ¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that

what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

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

Sermon *Epiphany Sunday*

The season of Christmas is there to welcome and introduce the one who brings the salvation of the LORD into this world. Before the promises of the LORD were ethereal, without form, and unrecognizable to our human eyes. But with the incarnation now the divine comes in a way we can see, witness, and accept because it is in a form we can understand. We now know the one who comes in the LORD’s name, but what affect will this Jesus have on us and the world? What will he inspire and bring out among those who he meets and who see him? How will this news change how everyone lives going forward?

That is what Epiphany stands for and makes us realize. This sudden realization of truth grabs our attention from the distractions around us, confronts us with reality as the LORD gives it, and brings us to a decision. It is a hope as well as a confrontation from what we have been living to this point. And in many cultures around the world this is the celebration that is focused on. Many also call this “Three Kings Day” to reflect on the journey of the magi as they went and presented their gifts before the newborn Messiah. They are symbols and reflections of how the LORD’s salvation bursts into this world to bring about change. And we reflect on their story in Matthew 2:1-23.

It has been traditionally communicated that these magi were like kings or rich men who see something of curiosity and decide on a whim to follow it. But these magi, these wise men, were more like scholars and court advisors than actual political leaders. Many kings and emperors kept a pool of learned men to give advice, do research, and carry out directives in the management of a kingdom or empire. And these learned men from the East come from a very peculiar tradition which links to this event taking place in the heavens.

It goes back to the time of the Babylonian conquest of the Israelites centuries ago. Many of the aristocrats, priests, scholars, and others were put into the court service of the Babylonians. Many of these would have brought their ancient scriptures and documents that were preserved in Babylonian archives and would have been passed down to apprentices and students. They would have read the words of Isaiah 60:1-22.

That prophet speaks about how the coming of the LORD would restore the fortunes of his people. To the point where not only their land and fortunes would be restored, but their reputation as well. To the point where other nations would seek out Israel for the wisdom and power given to it. Other peoples would bring all they had, and give up all they had, in order to access and be part of it. A deity who had allowed his people to be humbled and then build them back up into the greatest of peoples would have puzzled

these foreign scholars and make them curious how such a feat could even happen! It would go against all convention, everything known to be true at the time, and introduce a change in living in response to it. And seeing a star come out of nowhere would have made these even more aware that something was happening. It would make them risk their fortunes, life and limb, and leaving behind all they had for years just to confirm. It would make them challenge other rulers in their power and reveal their motivations just by the actions they were taking.

The arrival of the LORD's power was not going to just reveal righteous motivations but also destructive and selfish motivations. As soon as these foreigners came to Jerusalem and revealed the intent of their search all in power became upset. King Herod was ruling only by the promise that he could keep order for the Roman Empire, and the same with the priests in the Temple. Their intents were not on seeking how the LORD would visit salvation and change his people but keeping power and control. Which is what made them commit mass murder of innocent children. It could be seen that the announcement of this divine birth was a universal unveiling of where true motives lay, and why the salvation of the LORD is necessary. And St. Paul articulates this within his teaching in Ephesians 3:1-21.

St. Paul is known as the 'Apostle to the Gentiles', the one who makes the truth of the gospel known to those outside of the Jewish people. His focus was how the arrival, and teaching, of Jesus Christ brings all peoples back to their Creator and restores fortunes in every context. Even while writing from prison, he expresses the power of the LORD, of Jesus Christ, to reach out and leave in awe all who encounter it. It is a power which cannot be explained by human means because it changes and restores what it means to be human. He reveals all mysteries previously undiscovered or ignored so truth might flourish and change what we do. If the gospel has truly come to reach out to those on the outside of our lives, then it should make us look at these in a different manner. As worthy of the LORD's love as us, and as capable of experiencing change from lives and actions currently lived. It is a promise of reset for all people, and a promise to see who truly seeks mercy and who only pays lip-service to it.

We are all at different points in seeing the level of the LORD's salvation and change in our world. We think, theorize, and speculate how it will come about and what we need from it. But the arrival of Jesus Christ changes all; so we might see the true heights, depths, widths, and lengths of what Jesus will change. It will cause us to make some important and difficult choices and see some others differently as a result. But it also asks if the mercy and wisdom of the LORD is enough for us, and if we trust in divine power to reveal all we need. Epiphany is not about who has knowledge and who does not, and who is able to get it and who cannot. Epiphany obliterates all we know to be true and replaces it with better knowledge and truth to be able to live. No matter who we are we come in a common desire to seek and know. Will it change us in how we act going forward, or will we still cling to false hopes and securities knowing they will lead to destruction? Let the light of the divine show and guide us to that choice.

Celebration of Holy Communion

Let us remember in prayer:

Dominic Aquino, Tom & Amy Aquino, Mary Ellen Beans, Terry Carpenter, Fritz Chambers, Angie Chamberlain, Michelle Chamberlain, Mary Jane Dougherty, Don Eberheart Jr., Allison Folly, Kay France, Jamie Frank, Judy Hass, Alice & Errol Jacobs, Barry Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, Breanne Mathias, Peg McIntire, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, John Pittman, Carol Phillips, Janet Porter, Mark Preusser, Stefani Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Marlene Singhaus, Dean Smith, Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Janis Stover, Simone Villarruel, Jay Watt, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Father, the summoning of the magi is a fulfillment of promises made from ancient days. Promises to your people to summon them from exile, to gather together your beloved, and make a single people who will stand for and represent all that your kingdom is. We celebrate that Jesus Christ is the culmination of all these promises, who inspires our future actions, and secures knowledge that anything done after his name will make a difference to those who watch us. But his arrival also reveals those peoples and powers who do not seek your wisdom, who do not desire to cooperate, and will use any means to circumvent your rule. Help us to watch for those, help us to see them by your illumination, and in their midst demonstrate what is better for them follow.

Our lives are filled with areas of haze and darkness, places we do not know exist and we often overlook. We think some of our actions are no big deal, but they contribute to lives and values which can have a bigger impact than we know. How we treat others shows what we think is important and how we see you. One of the greatest instructions of Jesus given to his disciples, then and now, by the breaking of bread and blessing of the cup. He feeds us now to demonstrate what his coming means for all circumstances and situations and readies us to give the same to those we encounter. May all we receive reveal all we need to know to worship, to serve, and to love in a manner our world, our community, needs to see. **Amen.**

Receiving the Elements

Lord, our Father, your wisdom made flesh, your inspiration placed in our grasp, your body and blood is how we may live and know the life you desire for us. All so we might pray your prayer in hope of what we can accomplish by your movement in our lives:

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

The LORD's actions inspire the peoples of creation to come and bring their best in
homage, so let us bring our best to see what he will accomplish.

Offertory *O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee* arr. Wood

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 Father, you summon us to give our best to you in recognition for all you
have done. We give not to earn, but to praise and recognize who is best for this world.
Accept all we give and allow your people to prosper by your invitation and wisdom.

Amen.

Hymn #28 *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

Good Christian friends, rejoice
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before Him bow,
And He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!

Good Christian friends, rejoice,
With heart, and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath opened heaven's door,
And we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!

Good Christian friends, rejoice,
With heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save!

Calls you one and calls you all,
To gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!

***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 Praise arr. Eliot**

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

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