

**HAGERSVILLE UNITED CHURCH &
SPRINGVALE UNITED CHURCH
SUNDAY, JANUARY 3rd, 2021**

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REGIONAL COUNCIL PRAYER CYCLE

Walton Memorial

Epiphany Sunday

Epiphany, also known as "Three Kings Day" and "Twelfth Day," is a **Christian holiday commemorated on January 6**. It falls on the twelfth day after Christmas, and for some denominations signals the conclusion of the Christmas season. The 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany are known as the "Twelve Days of Christmas."

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: The Magi waited and watched, knowing something wondrous would be happening.

P: We waited for the birth of Jesus; now something wondrous is about to take root.

L: The darkness that invaded all lives was banished by the light of that star.

P: The darkness what surrounds us is gone!

L: Let us celebrate the bright shining of God's love in our lives.

P: Let us become those who will bring the light of God's love to others.

OPENING HYMN: #91 The First Nowell

1 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.**

2

2 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. **R**

3 And by the light of that same star
three wise men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went. **R**

4 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. **R**

5 Then entered in those wise men three,
full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there in his presence
their gold and myrrh and frankincense. **R**

6 Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,
and with his blood our life hath bought. **R**

OPENING PRAYER

God of Promise and mysterious Light, be with us this day as we journey in our faith; to meet your Gift. Give us courage and hope along our way, as your light will continue to glow brightly in our path, leading us to service and discipleship in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

CHILDREN'S STORY

CHILDRENS SONG

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord of living light, we hear the story of the Magi and tie it together with our warm Christmas celebration. It feels comfortable to us. Break

those bonds of comfort and help us to realize the risk of witness and discipleship for those who follow your light. Shine brightly in us and through us. Forgive the blindness we so often offer to you. Give us vision of what you would have us be and do in the Light of Your Love. AMEN.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Light has come to you. Your light has come and it has erased the darkness. Now we can walk and work in the light. You are loved by God and called to God's service. AMEN.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 148

¹ Praise the LORD.^[a]

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for at his command they were created,

⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

¹² young men and women,
old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn,^[b]
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.

Galatians 4:4-7

New International Version

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.^[a] ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*,^[b] Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Matthew 2:1-12

New International Version

The Magi Visit the Messiah

² After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler

who will shepherd my people Israel.”^[b]

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were

overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

MESSAGE: Shepherds, Wise Men and a Star

The Magi have come to be known as "wise men" because they were scholars whose knowledge of both astrological science and religious prophecies helped them figure out that the unusually bright star they saw shining over Bethlehem pointed the way to the one they believed was the Messiah (the world's saviour), for whom they were waiting to come to Earth at the right time.

Remember, the wise men had studied, prayed and searched. They were watching the skies. They learned, and hoped, and waited. Then they saw the star. And when they did, they recognized it and they followed it. Even though they knew what the star meant when they saw it, they still had a long journey ahead of them before they actually saw the Christ Child.

Contrast this with the story of the shepherds. They were going about their business, "watching their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid." I am sure that their shock came not just from seeing an angel, but because it was unexpected. They were just going about their lives, and they were presented with a miraculous vision. They immediately made the short journey to Bethlehem and saw the baby Jesus.

So, what does this mean to us in 2021...

I think this is the way that Christ works in our lives too—sometimes we experience Christ's grace after we have been waiting, watching, hoping and praying, and sometimes we are given moments of grace as we go about our everyday lives.

In life, these "wisemen" moments are things like:

- § Receiving an answer to a long-term prayer
- § Getting a piece of inspiration that helps answer a nagging question
- § Feeling a small measure of peace about a situation that has been hard for a long time and may not ever be fully resolved in this life

§ Feeling God's help to make progress in overcoming grief, loneliness, pain and suffering

In life, these "shepherd" moments are things like:

- § Feeling calm in the mist of grief
- § Knowing that you are doing the right thing
- § Calling a friend or someone you haven't spoken to for a long time that brings joy
- § Feeling more fully the love of God when you see or hear something beautiful

Sometimes, we are like the wise men—we really seek after Christ. We work, ponder, pray, hope and anticipate. And sometimes, we are like the shepherds and Christ's grace is

instantaneous. Either way, His love is a gift ... and it can change us.

So, how does the story end? We read that when the wise men saw the star, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" and they followed it.

When they found Mary, Joseph and the child, they "fell down and worshiped him" and then went home by another way. We read that the shepherds, when the angels left, "came with haste and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger," and they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen."

Both the shepherds and the wise men recognized the light when it came, followed it, and received Christ into their lives. And I think it is safe to say that their lives were changed from that day forward.

One thing I want to point out is that, while there is definitely something to be said for waiting, learning and hoping these things are not prerequisites to experiencing the love of God in our lives. God's love for us is a constant and the miracle is that it is always there in every situation of our lives. Think about it...

Sometimes we are like the Wise Men, seeking, wandering in the desert looking for the answers to our prayers, looking for that guiding light and that can change us. And, sometimes we can be like the Shepherds and we hear, find, see the light, the answers to our prayers come right away ... and it changes us.

It is hard to describe exactly how this change takes place. I'm not sure I really understand it. What I do know is that when I have these moments of grace, I feel inspired to do and be better and learn that patience is gift and God does eventually shows the light of his presence.

In this New Year, it is my hope and my prayer that we can look for, recognize, and appreciate these moments of grace...whether they come after we have been waiting, hoping, and praying or unexpectedly, as we go about our everyday lives. Either way, I know that God meets us where we are ... wherever we are ... and that Christ's grace is sufficient. I am grateful for the ways I have experienced it in my life. Don't give up HOPE... God is with us and will show us the way as he did the Wise Men and the Shepherds by the light of a Star. Remember ... When the Kings and Shepherds have found their way home ... the work of Christmas has begun.

HYMN: #81 As With Gladness Men of Old

- 1 As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore your splendour see.
- 2 As with joyful steps they sped, to that lowly manger bed,
there to bend the knee before
Christ, whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with eager pace ever seek your throne of grace.
- 3 As they offered gifts most rare at that manger crude and bare,
so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to you, our heavenly King.
- 4 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 your glory hide.
- 5 In the heavenly country bright none shall need created light;
you its light, its joy, its crown,
you its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing hallelujah to our King.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord of bright and abiding Light, you have shone us, in the person of Jesus your Son, a new way to live. You have poured your light into the world and have asked us to live in the light rather than run and hide in the darkness of doubt and despair. You promise to be our light all of our days and ask us to place our trust in you. The journey in this light is risky. It means that we will have to be very serious about our service to you, giving you our best and offering hope and light to others. In this new year, we bring to you the names and situations of others for whom light seems to be a stranger. They struggle with ill health, economic hardship, broken and damaged relationships, loss of loved ones, and anxiety. We place them in your care. Let your light shine on them, bringing healing and hope. Help us to be bearers of that light in all that we do; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING HYMN: #87 I Am the Light of the World

**'I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow me!'
If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery
of what you were meant to do and be.**

- 1 When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the shepherds have found
their way home,
the work of Christmas is begun: **R**
- 2 To find the lost and lonely one,
to heal the broken soul with love,
to feed the hungry children with warmth
and good food,
to feel the earth below, the sky above! **R**
- 3 To free the prisoner from all chains,
to make the powerful care,
to rebuild the nations with strength of good will,
to see God's children everywhere! **R**

- 4 To bring hope to every task you do,
to dance at a baby's new birth,
to make music in an old person's heart,
and sing to the colours of the earth! **R**

SENDING FORTH

We have been given the Great Light, which has come into the world. This light of peace and hope, joy and love, shines on us, in us, and through us, to all whom we meet. Go now in peace, and let the light of God's great love go with you.
AMEN.

CHORAL AMEN

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