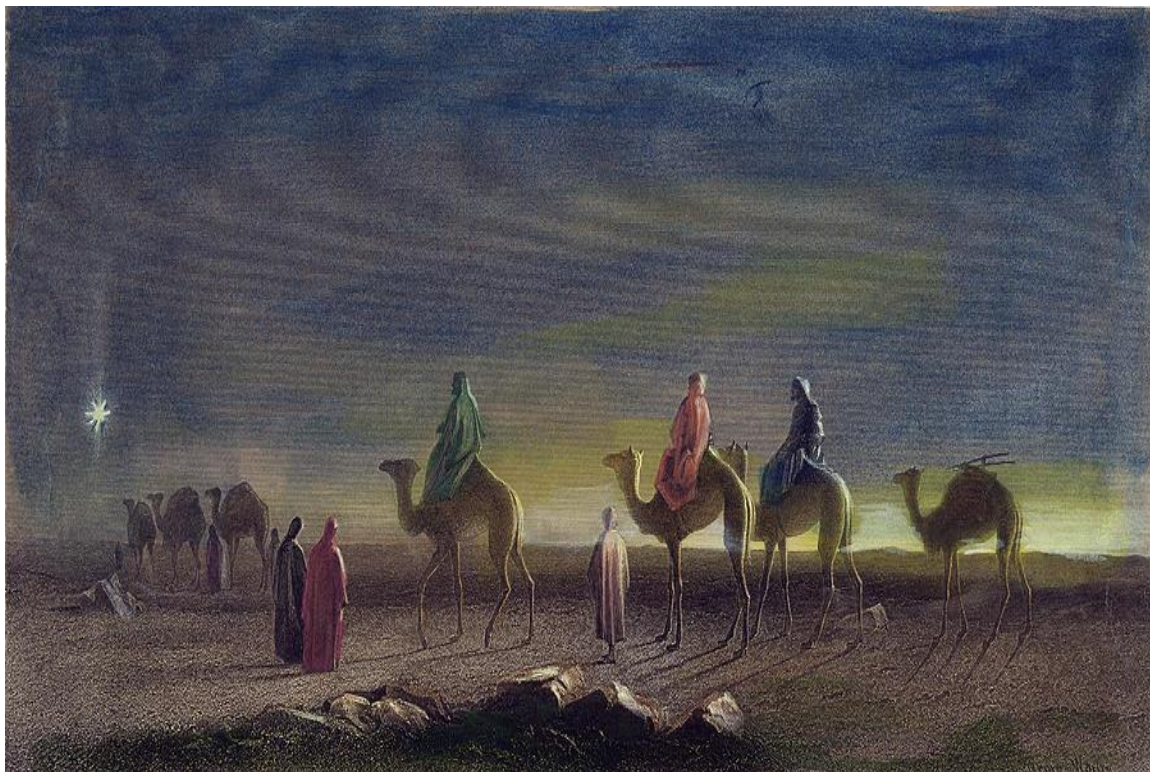


***The Lutheran Church of the Covenant***  
***“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”***



*Epiphany of Our Lord*  
*January 3, 2021*

**Epiphany of Our Lord**



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

*The feast of Epiphany (“manifestation”) concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God’s glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.*

Prelude *Wintertime Pastoral* (ROWLAND-RAYBOLD)

Confession & Forgiveness

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God’s relentless grace.*

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,  
who was in the beginning,  
who makes a dwelling among us,  
who covers us with justice and mercy.  
**Amen!**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

God of goodness and lovingkindness,  
**we confess that we have sinned against you  
and our neighbors.**  
**We have turned away from your invitation to new life.**  
**We have turned away from the lowly and downtrodden.**  
**In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins,**  
**those we know and those known only to you,**  
**for the sake of the one who came to live among us,**  
**Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.**

Hear the good news of peace and salvation!  
God forgives us all our sins,  
not through our own work,

but through † Jesus Christ, made known to all people.  
 With all who come to the manger,  
 rejoice in this amazing gift of grace.  
**Amen!**

Gathering Hymn *Christ, Be Our Light*

#715



1 Long - ing for light, we wait in dark - ness. Long - ing for  
 2 Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled. Long - ing for  
 3 Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry. Long - ing for  
 4 Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home - less. Long - ing for  
 5 Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple, man - y the



truth, we turn to you. Make us your own,  
 hope, man - y de - spair. Your word a - lone  
 wa - ter, man - y still thirst. Make us your bread,  
 warmth, man - y are cold. Make us your build - ing,  
 hearts that yearn to be - long. Let us be ser - vants



your ho - ly peo - ple, light for the world to see.  
 has pow'r to save us. Make us your liv - ing voice.  
 bro - ken for oth - ers, shared un - til all are fed.  
 shel - ter - ing oth - ers, walls made of liv - ing stone.  
 to one an - oth - er, signs of your king - dom come.

*Refrain*



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the



dark - ness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your



church gath - ered to - day.

Text: Bernadette Farrell, b. 1957  
 Music: CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT, Bernadette Farrell  
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Prayer of the Day

O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us

now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen!**

First Lesson

Isaiah 60:1-6

*Jerusalem is assured that nations will make a pilgrimage to her because the light of God's presence is in her midst. The bountiful food of the sea and the profits of international trade will come streaming to Jerusalem and thereby declare God's praise.*

<sup>1</sup>Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>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.

Word of God, word of life!

**Thanks be to God!**

Psalm

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

<sup>1</sup>Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to the king's son;

<sup>2</sup>**that he may rule your people righteously**

**and the poor with justice;**

<sup>3</sup>that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

**<sup>4</sup>Let him defend the needy among the people, rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.**

<sup>5</sup>May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another.

**<sup>6</sup>Let him come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.**

<sup>7</sup>In his time may the righteous flourish; and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

**<sup>10</sup>May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.**

<sup>11</sup>May all kings bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.

**<sup>12</sup>For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress, the oppressed, and those who have no helper.**

<sup>13</sup>He has compassion on the lowly and poor, and preserves the lives of the needy.

**<sup>14</sup>From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, and precious is their blood in his sight.**

Second Lesson

Ephesians 3:1-12

*What had been hidden from previous generations is now made known through the gospel ministry of Paul and others. In Christ both Jews and Gentiles participate in the richness of God's promised salvation.*

<sup>1</sup>This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup>for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, <sup>3</sup>and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, <sup>4</sup>a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. <sup>5</sup>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: <sup>6</sup>that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup>in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Word of God, word of life!

**Thanks be to God!**

Gospel Acclamation

*As with Gladness Men of Old*

Verses 1, 2, 5

#302



1 As with glad - ness men of old did the guid - ing star be - hold;  
2 As with joy - ful steps they sped, Sav - ior, to thy low - ly bed,  
3 As they of - fered gifts most rare at thy cra - dle, rude and bare,  
4 Ho - ly Je - sus, ev - 'ry day keep us in the nar - row way;  
5 In the heav'n - ly coun - try bright need they no cre - a - ted light;



as with joy they hailed its light, lead - ing on - ward, beam - ing bright;  
there to bend the knee be - fore thee, whom heav'n and earth a - dore;  
so may we with ho - ly joy, pure and free from sin's al - loy,  
and when earth - ly things are past, bring our ran - somed souls at last  
thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down;



so, most gra - cious Lord, may we ev - er - more be led by thee.  
so may we with will - ing feet ev - er seek thy mer - cy seat.  
all our cost - liest trea - sures bring, Christ, to thee, our heav'n - ly king.  
where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glo - ry hide.  
there for - ev - er may we sing al - le - lu - ias to our king.

Text: William C. Dix, 1837–1898, alt.  
Music: DIX, Conrad Kocher, 1786–1872

Gospel

Matthew 2:1-12

*God's promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king.  
Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.*

<sup>1</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men

from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>‘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.’”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord!

**Praise to you, O Christ!**

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *The First Noel*

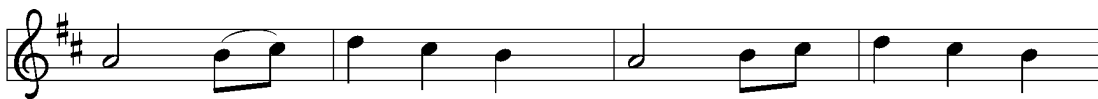
#300



1 The first No - el the an - gel did say was to  
2 They look - ed up and saw . . . a star shin - ing  
3 And by the light of that . . . same star three . .  
4 This star drew near to the . . . north - west, o'er . .  
5 Then en - tered in those wise . . . men three, full . .



cer - tain poor shep - herds in fields as they lay; in fields where  
in . . . the east . . be - yond . . them far; and to the  
wise . . men came . . from coun - try far; to seek for a  
Beth - le - hem . . it took . . its rest; and there it  
rev - 'rent - ly . . . up - on . . . their knee, and of - fered



they lay, keep - ing their sheep, on a cold win - ter's  
earth it gave . . . great light, and . . so it con -  
king was their . . . in - tent, and to fol - low the  
did both stop . . . and stay right . . o - ver the  
there in his . . . pres - ence their . . . gold, . . . and

*Refrain*



night that was so deep.  
tin - ued both day and night.  
star wher - ev - er it went. No - el, No - el, No -  
place where Je - sus lay.  
myrrh, and frank - in - cense.



el, No - el! Born is the King of Is - ra - el.

Text: English traditional

Music: THE FIRST NOWELL, English traditional



## Prayers of Intercession

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

Glorious God, fill your whole church with joy. Let your faithful people live as beacons of your redemption. Give wisdom and courage to your church that it may speak with boldness and confidence, even when words of mercy are met with scorn. O God, shining with grace, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Show us your faithfulness in the rising and setting of the sun. Place wonder into the hearts of those who search the skies and explore the heavens. Curb waste and pollution, that all might have clean air to breathe. O God, preserver of creation, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bring all nations and rulers to the splendor of your dawn. Raise up advocates who champion the cause of exploited and vulnerable people. Inspire leaders to be generous with abundance, that all people might live in stability and freedom. O God, compassionate savior, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Come quickly with your healing power to all who seek love, support, and restoration. Dispel fears and shadows. Restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. Bring relief to those who are sick or struggling. O God, giver of life, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Send traveling mercies upon all who journey home by other roads. Guard refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Protect families fleeing conflict in their homelands or abuse in their homes. Tend to those who have no place to lay their heads. O God, refuge of the downhearted, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

According to the boundless riches of Christ, you draw all your saints, from the least to the greatest, to your heavenly places. As you created all things, make all things new again in the splendor of your glory. O God, light of holiness, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Music Interlude *The First Noel!* (KEESECKER)

*Please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart.*

Thanksgiving for the Word

Holy God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor,  
at the birth of time your Word brought light into the world,  
and throughout the ages, you proclaim newness of life.  
For your wondrous Word, we thank you, O God.

**We thank you, O God!**

In the fullness of time, your Word became flesh,  
to shine in our world's darkness,  
to speak peace to all people,  
and to welcome us as members of your family.  
For your loving Word, we adore you, O God.

**We adore you, O God!**

Grant us now the gift of you as the Holy Spirit,  
that held, nourished, and protected by your Word,  
we may live as your children,  
bearing your goodness throughout the world.  
For your powerful Word, we praise you, O God.

**We praise you, O God!**

All glory to you, holy God,  
now and forever.

**Amen!**

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

Almighty God,  
who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary,  
proclaimed joy through the angels,  
sent the shepherds with good news,  
and led the magi by a star,  
bless you this day ☩ through the Word made flesh. **Amen!**

Sending Hymn *Light Dawns on a Weary World*

#726



1 Light dawns on a wea - ry world when eyes be - gin to  
 2 Love grows in a wea - ry world when hun - gry hearts find  
 3 Hope blooms in a wea - ry world when crea - tures, once for -



see all peo - ple's dig - ni - ty. Light dawns on a  
 bread and chil - dren's dreams are fed. Love grows in a  
 lorn, find wil - der - ness re - born. Hope blooms in a



wea - ry world: the prom - ised day of jus - tice comes.  
 wea - ry world: the prom - ised feast of plen - ty comes.  
 wea - ry world: the prom - ised green of E - den comes.



*Refrain*

The trees shall clap their hands; the dry lands, gush with springs;



the hills and moun - tains shall break forth with sing - ing!



We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace,



as all the world in won - der ech - oes sha - lom.

Text: Mary Louise Bringle, b. 1953

Music: TEMPLE OF PEACE, William P. Rowan, b. 1951

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Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the gift of the Messiah with the world!

**Thanks be to God!**

Postlude *Angels We Have Heard on High* (LEAVITT)

## Praying Together

**... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating:** Gayle Agg, Tonya Black, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Steve Dobush, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Arlene Stoltz, Tim Susanek, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family, Linda Allende at the death of her sister.

### LAST WEEK

General Fund receipts for week ending 12/27/2020: \$4525

## *Lectionary Blog: God Reunites and Welcomes*



*Padua - The paint of the Adoration of Magi scene in Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta (Duomo) by Francesco Zanella (1671 - 1717).*

[Today] we celebrate by remembering and looking forward to the radical inclusivity of Jesus' kingdom. The story of the magi coming to visit Jesus is famous and associated with the Christmas story, but I love how the other lectionary readings paint an even fuller picture of the reconciliation that comes with the birth and reign of Jesus.

The Isaiah passage lists people, as represented by national animals, who will stream to the new Light that the Lord will cause to shine upon the reconstituted people of Israel (Isaiah 60:1, 3). The "camels" of Midian, Ephah and Sheba will come, bringing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praise of the Lord (Isaiah 60:6). The people in view lived in today's Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen and Somalia, roughly. I remember my first trip to Oman, scraping the resin that is made into frankincense from the gnarled trees, and thinking what a long journey the sticky sap, and the people who carried it, must have made across the Arabian peninsula to where it was sold in the Levant (Exodus 30:34, Leviticus 2:1). Instead of economic motivation, Isaiah looked forward to a day when people would come to worship God.

The next verse, not part of the lectionary, adds that Kedar and Nebaioth (both of whom were central Arabian tribes) will also join the procession to minister, and they will be fully acceptable in God's house (Isaiah 60:7). The Psalm reading for this week also spoke of the rulers Sheba and Seba coming to bring gifts and bow before God's anointed king (Psalm 72:10-11).

Midian, Ephah, Sheba, Seba, Kedar and Nebaioth were all descendants of Abraham, but through Hagar (Genesis 25:13) and Keturah (Genesis 25:2-4), rather than Sarah. Abraham had sent all his other descendants away from Isaac so they would not share his inheritance. In time, these tribes had become followers of other gods and the Israelites' mortal enemies. But God, through the dawning of the Light, gathered together what man had separated. Abraham sent away his sons, but God gathers together all God's children.

But God, through the dawning of the Light, gathered together what man had separated. Abraham sent away his sons, but God gathers together all God's children. The lectionary passages argue that these people will sojourn to meet God, not because of great majesty, but because of justice and righteousness (Psalm 72:1-2). God's anointed leader will defend the poor, give deliverance to the needy and crush their oppressor (Psalm 72:3, 11-14). For the psalmist, the most attractive aspect of the ruler of the kingdom of heaven is not wealth or even power, but the righteous protection and provision received of the poor, and the justice meted out to those who oppress them. This is the kingdom we pray to come when we ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So, then, we turn to a modest dwelling in Bethlehem. After the census was over and everyone else went home, Joseph, Mary and Jesus had finally moved from their semiprivate and relatively warm stable (think of an insulated garage) and had been welcomed into the guestroom/*kataluma* (note that Luke's Gospel uses a different word, *pandeion* for "inn" in 10:34). This room would have been overflowing during the census with Joseph's extended family, but available after they left. The family had come in from the stable to the main house, but they are still by no means wealthy, powerful or important from an earthly perspective.

But magi, Zoroastrian religious professionals, showed up to this humble home bearing gifts fit for a king. The scene must have been utterly incongruous as their wealth and foreign appearance clashed with the holy family's local modesty. The magi represented the firstfruits of fulfillment of prophecies from Isaiah and Psalms that people from east of the Holy Land would travel to see the ruler of God's kingdom. They visited Herod, that great builder and influential client of the Romans, but only to ask him for directions to the child who would proclaim peace, neighbor-love, humility and allegiance to God's kingdom over earthly powers. He would be killed by the empire for doing so. The magi came to honor a humble child, not a wealthy and influential tyrant.

The readings this week could not be clearer about how to think about Epiphany. God reunites and welcomes the people whom humans have sent away. God attracts not through wealth or power, but through justice and righteousness on behalf of the poor and needy. The fulfillment of God's will as spoken through the prophet is when people who come from different ethnic, national and even religious backgrounds are welcomed and appreciated at the end of their holy journeys.

*This article was originally published December 31, 2018 on LivingLutheran.org.*



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## **Blessing for a Home**

*We heard in Matthew's gospel that when the magi saw the shining star stop overhead, they were filled with joy. In the home, Christ is met with family and friends, in visitors and strangers. In the home, faith is shared, nurtured and put into action. In the home,*

*Christ is welcome. For gatherings of families, each member may take turns in parts of the blessing. Following an eastern European tradition, a visual blessing may be inscribed with white chalk above the main door; for example, 20 + CMB + 21. The numbers change with each new year. The three letters stand for either the ancient Latin blessing *Christe mansionem benedicat*, which means “Christ, bless this house,” or the legendary names of the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar).*

May peace be to this house and to all who enter here.

By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. (*Proverbs 24:3-4*)

As we prepare to ask God’s blessing on this household, let us listen to the words of scripture: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being, and the life was the light of all people. The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (*John 1:1-4, 14, 16*)

*This inscription may be made with chalk above the entrance:* 20 + C M B + 21

*Write the appropriate character (left) while speaking the text (right).*

The magi of old, known as

C Caspar,

M Melchior, and

B Balthasar,

followed the star of God’s Son who came to dwell among us

20 two thousand

21 and twenty-one years ago.

+ Christ, bless this house,

+ and remain with us throughout the new year.

O God, you revealed your Son to all people by the shining light of a star. We pray that you bless this home and all who live here with your gracious presence. May your love be our inspiration, your wisdom our guide, your truth our light, and your peace our benediction; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**