January 4, 2026 + 10:30 A.M.

Epiphany Sunday

We Join in Worship

Liturgist: Jean Smith

If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.

PRELUDE

Let All Things Now Living

Arr. Cindy Berry

WELCOME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

*THE PEACE OF CHRIST

*CALL TO WORSHIP (from Psalm 29)

Leader:

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

People:

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.

Leader:

The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

People:

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.

Leader:

The Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people!

People:

May the Lord bless his people with peace! Let us worship the Lord!

*OPENING HYMN: "As With Gladness Men of Old" (63)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader:

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that in Christ Jesus we have access to God in boldness and confidence

through faith. As the magi stepped out in faith, we, too, can step forward boldly with our

confession before our loving God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

Gracious God, we humbly come before you, asking for your mercy and forgiveness. We confess that we often get distracted from where our focus should be. We don't always pay attention to the bright lights and stars you place to guide us. Oftentimes we'd rather follow paths of our own making than turn to you because of our shame, our pride, and our sin. Forgive us when we ignore the light of your son Jesus, or the times when we block out the light for others because they are different than us. Help us to follow the journey you've lovingly laid out for us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

KYRIE: Glory to God, No. 579 (unison)

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader:

Friends, hear the good news! Jesus Christ was born to save us!

ALL:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

GLORIA PATRI (unison, 577)

Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

STATEMENT OF FAITH (from A Brief Statement of Faith)

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve... In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives.

We Hear God's Word

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Almighty God, by the light of your Holy Spirit, reveal to us your saving Word and lead us to offer our lives to you in service and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON:

Isaiah 60:1-6

EPISTLE LESSON:

Ephesians 3:1-12

GOSPEL LESSON:

Matthew 2:1-12

SERMON:

Permission to Enter

MUSICAL MEDITATION:

What Child Is This?

William Chatterton Dix

Violin Soloist: Tristan Casiano

We Respond in Faith

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

If in the depths of your spirit you are crying out, "Come thou long expected Jesus;" this table has been laid out for you. For those who sing, "born to set your people free," the table of the Lord has a place for you. If your heart aches to be released from fear and despair, receive the bread of Heaven and the cup of Salvation. Come, find your rest in Jesus Christ. The feast of communion is prepared for you. Come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:

Leader:

The Lord be with you.

ALL:

And also with you.

Leader:

Let us give thanks to the Lor our God.

ALL:

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is truly right and our greatest joy... who forever sing to the glory of your name:

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 your name. Hosanna in the highest.

You are holy, O God of majesty... dedicated to your service. Praise to you, Lord Jesus:

Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit... all glory and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Loving and gracious God, from east and west, from north and south, you have gathered us at your table, called us your beloved, and fed us from your body. Transform us to be your body in the world, and fortify us by your Spirit, so that we may serve you and our neighbors with great joy. Amen.

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader:

The magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn king. Let us also bring our gifts to pay homage and continue the work of that king. If you did not do so as you entered, please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website.

OFFERTORY

I Wonder As I Wander

Arr. Jack Schrader

* DOXOLOGY:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise God, all creatures high and low; Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise God, in Jesus fully known; Creator, Word, and Spirit one; Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

Generous and loving God, just as the wisemen presented their gifts and treasures to your son Jesus, today we dedicate our gifts and treasures to you. May these offerings be used according to your will to bring you glory and honor. Amen.

We Go Into the World

* CLOSING HYMN: "What Star Is This, With Beams So Bright" (68)

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

This Is My Father's World

Franklin L. Sheppard, arr. Cindy Berry

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* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 1/4:

Adult Study - 9:00 AM

Communion

Worship In Person & Online – 10:30 AM

Taking down the Greens

MONDAY 1/5:

Women's Bible Study – 9:15-11:30 AM (FH)

GA - 6:30 PM

Al-Anon - 7:00 PM

TUESDAY 1/6:

Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH)

Deacons - 6:30 PM

AA - 7:30 PM

WEDNESDAY 1/7:

Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH)

"Bring Your Own Bible" Bible Study 7-8 PM (Zoom)

GA - 7:00 PM

THURSDAY 1/8:

Choir - 7:00 PM

SATURDAY 1/10:

Cook for Shelter – 1:00 PM

AA - 6:30 PM

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- <u>TAKING DOWN THE GREENS TODAY AFTER WORSHIP</u> Please stick around to help our if you are available!
- <u>INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS JANUARY 11TH DURING WORSHIP</u> We will be installing our new officers during worship on Sunday, January 11th. If you were elected to serve in 2026 during our December congregational meeting, please plan on being present!
- <u>ANNUAL MEETING AND LUNCHEON JANUARY 25TH AFTER WORSHIP</u> Our congregation's annual meeting will be after worship on Sunday, January 25th. We will have a potluck luncheon with meat provided by Session as well. Keep a look out for sign-ups soon!
- <u>"BYOB"</u> (Bring Your Own Bible) discussion group meets on Wednesday evenings from 7-8 pm online using Zoom. Each week this group takes a look at the scriptures from our Sunday worship services, asking questions, bringing up different perspectives, and hopefully encountering the Holy Spirit in a fresh way. The link for the Zoom meetings is emailed out weekly. You can connect to Zoom with a smart phone, tablet or computer. If you're not familiar with how to use Zoom, or to get on our e-mail list, please contact Pastor Tyler or Heather Casiano. BYOB will resume January 7!

- <u>"THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD"</u> class meets on Sunday mornings from 9-10 am in the middle classroom (across from Pastor Tyler's office). This group is reading through the book, "A is for Alabaster" by Anna Carter Florence. Each week is independent of the other weeks, so come as you are able. If you need a book, or for any other questions, contact Heather Casiano. We will resume January 4!
- The choir chairs are FINISHED! They are the culmination of a decades-long held dream of choir members, many of whom have joined the Heavenly Chorus and were part of the desire to have the chairs either replaced or reupholstered. We are joyously accepting donations to the Choir Chair Fund from anyone and everyone who wants to make a contribution in honor of or in memory of a cherished person in their lives who loves/loved music.
- FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA! If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- <u>INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?</u> You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- <u>BLESSING BOX</u> Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- <u>HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!</u> Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.

Prayer List

Anthony Brady Vanes George Griner Guy Hendricks

Bill and Anettia Holmes

David Markley

Pat and David Kingen Diana and Ray Mendoza

Janet Orem

Cindy Waltz and Sister Yvonne Suroviak Georgette Sknerski Jakob Holden Denise Matthys Jan Oprea

Florance Cody

Kathy & Chuck Pumnea Laura Buono Domsic The Windstrups Rick Parker Gary Everhart Caroline Studer Darlene O'Brien Doug & Sue Matthews

Janet Terpstra Glen Nahler

Tom

David Hamblin Jana Tolley

Larry & Bonnie Perryman

Delta Rose Winnie Owen Breeanne Mom Bechtler Victor

Marian Clayton

Ella P Melissa J. Rita Stronczek

Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon

OGB Edna Cruz Charlie

Jerry & Rena Martinez

Nicole Greg Pastor Jane

Mary Ellen Edeus Jane and David

Flora R. Tyler Gall Phil

Luana Sulkowski Sonny Buono Shannon Sutton

Robin Eunice Betsy David

Trina & Scott Joe & Kathy Breanne Polan

Tammy
Alex
Ben
Mike Kelly

Sue Heth

Isaiah 60:1-6

60 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. 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 in 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.

Ephesians 3:1-12

3 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 in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Matthew 2:1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi 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 in the east 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 magi 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 in the east, 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.

The Time for Dreaming

Psalm 72; Isaiah 60:1-6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Matthew 2:1-12

Happy New Year, loved ones! The turning of a new year carries meaning and significance in different ways for people. Some see it as an auspicious time, a time to make wishes and commitments, a time to set goals and to have high hopes about meeting them, a time of particularly positive growth. Others see it as an anxious time, for another year is a stark reminder of time marching on, a marker of inevitable and unwanted change, a season of unknowns and thus a season of things outside our control. Then again, others may be indifferent to it, shrugging their shoulders and saying that the way we track time is a human construct, a hubristic attempt to order that which cannot be ordered. The turning of a year is just a day or week or month like any other. Regardless of how we conceive of it and feel about it, the turning of a year presents us with an opportunity. We can choose to make something meaningful and significant out of it. We can choose to make commitments to grow. We can choose to be intentional about calming our anxieties. We can choose to use our human constructs of time to inspire us to focus our hearts and minds on the matters that truly matter. We can choose to see this time as the time for dreaming.

That, loved ones, is what I am challenging us to do as we enter a new year and as we enter a new liturgical season, the Season of Epiphany. I want us to recognize this as the time for dreaming. Dreaming takes different forms in our lives—a not-well-understood phenomenon of storytelling in our sleep, a daytime experience of our minds wandering, and a lifelong practice of imagining possibilities for the future. We are in good company when it comes to dreaming, for our scriptures are full of dreaming and our ancestors and ancestresses in the faith dreamt often. They dreamt in the same ways that we dream—at night, during the day, as a lifelong practice. And they added something substantial to their practice of dreaming. They opened themselves up to the possibility that God was speaking to them in their dreams. God spoke to them in that not-well-understood phenomenon of storytelling in their sleep, telling them of things that were to come in the near future or eschatological future. God spoke to them in their daytime wanderings of the mind, pulling their attention to matters of import for living righteously. God spoke to them in their imagining of possibilities for the future, providing prophetic visions of what could, of what would be if only they were to transform their hearts and minds and actions. Oh yes, God certainly spoke to and through dreams. And I would venture to guess that God is still speaking to us in our dreaming. After all, God speaks to us in every aspect of our lives. The question is, are we willing to open ourselves up to that possibility and to listen?

The time of the incarnation was a time of particularly potent dreaming. Of course it was. God was active in so many ways at that fullest of times, in the fullness of time. You see, God had been dreaming—imagining new creation for a world riven by strife and violence, giving birth to a vision of a Kin-dom grown and nurtured in the fertile soil of Love, the most fertile soil of all. And God was choosing to bring that dream to bear in the most concrete and effective of ways, by coming to the earth in the flesh and becoming one of us humans in the world—a human with the power to make that dream come true. To give that dream the best chance possible, God spoke to key people in—you guessed it!—dreams. As we heard last week, God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to deliver the message that he most definitely should go through with his marriage to Mary, pregnancy out of wedlock and all. And we can bet that Mary was doing her own dreaming. After all, she was carrying, giving birth to, and raising the messiah, the Word made flesh, the incarnate God! How could she not be doing some dreaming? We saw her magnificent dreaming for the future two weeks ago when she sang of the hungry being fed and the poor being lifted up, with the tyrants being toppled from her thrones. Oh yes, I have no doubt that our God of liberation was speaking into her dreams and inspiring the plans that were put into place for the raising of the enactor of liberation, the incarnation of Love!

And then, of course, we have the magi. Today is their big day! They must have been dreaming for a long time of miraculous events that might come to pass. They were gentiles from afar. They were not connected to the Israelites by culture or religion, and they were not connected to Palestine by geography. They read the scriptures of the movements of the celestial and terrestrial bodies rather than the scriptures of the Torah. They worshiped in the temple of the universe rather than in the temple of Jerusalem. Outside of the fold of Israel, they knew God in an entirely different way—in the way that God chose to reveal God's self to them. And because God loved them, God wanted them to be part of the miracle of the messiah, the miracle of the manifestation, the miracle of the incarnation. And because God loved the Israelites, God invited these others in who would force the Israelites to see what they themselves refused to see—the fulfillment of the promise. And because God loved the whole world, God became manifest as one of us, as a human child, and caused the very stars to align in such a way as to make sure that the whole world would know even if they had never known the scriptures or the vocabulary or the interpretations. EPIPHANY!

I wonder if epiphanies are really those moments when we finally remember or finally understand the things that God has spoken to us in our dreams, when those whispers become shouts of exclamation. I wonder if epiphanies are when the knowledge that God plants in us finally grows into fullness and blooms within our brains. Oh yes, the magi must have been dreaming. For, when they saw the star arise in the sky, they had a brilliant aha! moment and journeyed out to this faraway land without looking back. They kept their eyes trained on the star and kept their momentum forward. Hmmm, perhaps they were quite literally following their dreams in that star! And then, when they saw that the star had stopped, when they saw that their dream was about to come true, they were overwhelmed with joy. Overwhelmed with joy! It is such a strikingly beautiful feeling behold. I hope that you have been overwhelmed with joy at some point or many points in your life when struck by a dream coming true, by the bright light of an epiphany blazing forth in full glory!

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. Jesus would have been so young, I wonder what imprint it would have left upon his heart and brain. I wonder if he dreamt of it later or if he had dreamlike sequences of memories from the stories that his parents told him. However it sank into his psyche, the visit of the magi certainly left an indelible and important mark. For, he made sure to make it clear that his mission of love was universal, embracing gentiles throughout his life. He also never seemed to be intimidated by people in power. I wonder if that came from this early encounter of powerful people from afar paying kneeling before him and paying homage to him. And then, of course, these magi ensured that he would actually stay alive to embark on his mission of universal love and to challenge kings and emperors. For, once again, they had a dream.

In that dream, they were warned not to return to Herod. In other words, they were told to actively defy the orders of the king of all Judea in order to save the life of this child who had been born in a stable in Bethlehem. Oh yes, God was speaking! And it is a good thing that they listened. For, Herod had designs to kill

this child and all children in his age range in order to protect his own power, much like his successor rulers of Israel today. If only more faithful people from afar would rise up to protect the children of Palestine today like these courageous magi of old did! If only we were willing to be *their* successors in dreaming!

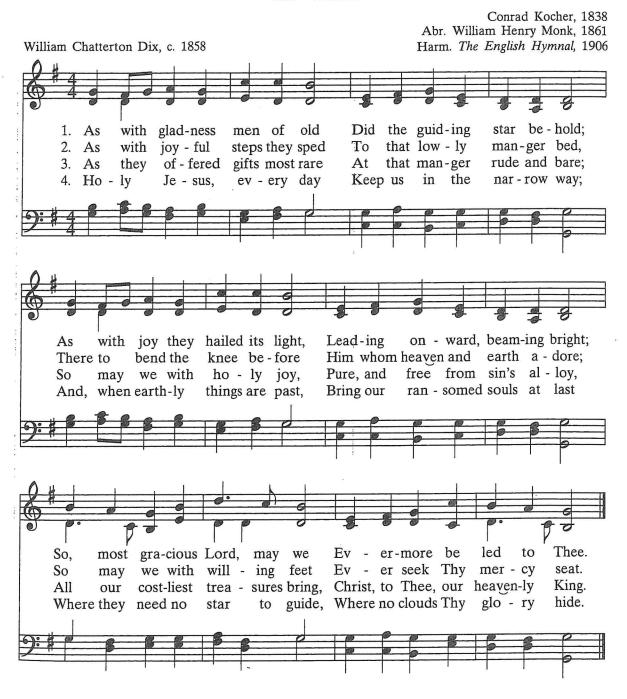
For, this is the time for dreaming! This is not just any new year. This is the new year 2025, and we need to dream like never before. There are Herods in power all over the world, choosing the way of violence over the way of peace, the way of hatred over the way of welcome, and the way of fear over the way of love. There are Herods in power all over the world who see their power as worth more than the lives of children. Oh yes, it is the time for dreaming! We need dreamers who will open themselves up to the possibility that God is speaking to them. We need dreamers who will follow stars and search of epiphanies. We need dreamers who will obey God's command to love at the cost of defying the Herods. We need dreamers who will choose the lives of the vulnerable over the power of the powerful. At a time when dreamers are about to face persecution and deportation like never before, we need more dreamers!

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 his 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!

Amen!

DIX 7.7.7.7.7



What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright

PUER NOBIS NASCITUR LM

