

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD  
JANUARY 3, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning* Setting: Wayne L. Wold

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #400 *Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning*

- 1 **Brightest and best of the stars of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;  
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.**
- 2 **Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining;  
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;  
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,  
Maker and Monarch and Savior of all.**
- 3 **Shall we not yield Him, in costly devotion,  
Fragrance of Edom and off'rings divine,  
Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,  
Myrrh from the forest and gold from the mine?**
- 4 **Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would His favor secure.  
Richer by far is the heart's adoration;  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.**
- 5 **Brightest and best of the stars of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;  
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

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

**Amen.**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

**But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

*Brief silence for reflection and self-examination.*

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

**Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

#### *KYRIE*

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.

**Amen.**

#### *GLORIA IN EXCELSIS*

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

**Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:**

**We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:**

**You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.**

**You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.**

**For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,**

**You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,**

**in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

#### *THE PRAYER OF THE DAY*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. O God,

**by the leading of a star You made known Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles. Lead us, who know You by faith, to enjoy in heaven the fullness of Your divine presence; through the same 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

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
Lift up your eyes all around, and see;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from afar,  
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and exult,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.  
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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 72:1–11*

Give the king your justice, O God,  
and your righteousness to the royal son!  
May he judge your people with righteousness,  
and your poor with justice!  
Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness!  
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the children of the needy,  
and crush the oppressor!  
May they fear you while the sun endures,  
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!  
May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,  
like showers that water the earth!  
In his days may the righteous flourish,  
and peace abound, till the moon be no more!  
May he have dominion from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth!  
May desert tribes bow down before him  
and his enemies lick the dust!

May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands  
render him tribute;  
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!  
May all kings fall down before him,  
all nations serve him!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

*SECOND LESSON* Ephesians 3:1–12

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*CHILDREN’S SERMON*

*ALLELUIA VERSE*

**Alleluia.  
Lord, to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life.  
Alleluia, alleluia.**

*GOSPEL* Matthew 2:1–12

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

**Glory to You, O Lord.**

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to You, O Christ**

### *SERMON*

“**Epiphany**” is a wonderful Greek word that means “**to show or reveal.**” During this season we will glimpse facets of the life of the child born in Bethlehem that reveal to us that He is the One (as John says in His Gospel), in Whom rests all the Divine Glory, and also the One Who is the fully human Son of Mary. He is the One Whom the winds and the sea obey, even though the sons of Abraham do not. He is the One before Whom no handicap or disease can stand. He is the One Who loves the very least one, Who reaches out to gather all into His arms. He is the One Who ordered all the stars into their places, even the star that calls Magi from the east to come to Him.

Matthew opens our Gospel with a word translated “**now.**” It is a word that connects phrases, and the phrase it connects us to is at vs 18 in C. 1, where Matthew tells of Jesus’ birth, beginning with Joseph’s plan to end his engagement to Mary. In both stories, human ignorance must be conquered by God’s direct intervention: **first**, by an angel giving direction to Joseph, and **here**, by a most special star drawing Magi from the East by way of Jerusalem. Matthew’s story is also about two very different kings, one who comes humbly, in swaddling cloths in a manger, and another whose pride-filled-evil heart would not share his glory with any other.

For the historians, King Herod’s place in the story provides more clues for dating the birth of Jesus than all the pondering over the dates of shining planets and comets, even more than the census of Caesar Augustus. Historians can reliably date King Herod the Great’s death to the year 4 BCE. And Jesus was born earlier, so probably 5 or 6 BCE.

But in this story, dates don’t matter, Gentiles do! While Priests and Levites in Jerusalem had not been searching the prophetic writings, some wise ones in the East were. And they linked those promises to a great star that suddenly called out to them from the heavens. **One** theme I want you to catch today is that God calls out, and sometimes is heard by those we least expected to listen. Since these Magi were from the east, that signals a **second** theme to take seriously: God is not confined by traditional boundaries, and this Savior is not just a Messiah for Israel!

After the story of the Bethlehem shepherds, who are important in Luke’s story, the very next people to worship at the side of the Christ child are these we might call “**foreigners.**” When God put the announcing sign of His Son’s birth in the heavens, He fulfilled the words of Isaiah (C 60), “**Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.**” Jesus was born as a son of King David in both Matthew and Luke, but in Matthew, this Son of David is Savior of all the nations.

When I was still an active member of the Board of Lutheran Social Services, it was my honor to both welcome and then tell the story of the Gjan family, refugees from Burma. By the stroke of an evil leader's pen, this family, who were an ethnic minority in Burma (Karens) - had been stripped of their citizenship. The Army launched an attack toward their jungle home to drive them away or kill them. Their village was forewarned, and families wrapped belongings into the kind of bundles you can carry on your shoulders, and ran in haste towards the nearest international border and safety. In the year the Gjan family fled, they became one family among 16.5 million refugees world-wide. Sadly the number is much higher now. More than 2 years after finding their way to the United Nations, the Gjan family was selected by our State Department, assigned to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee services, and finally met at BWI by the staff of Lutheran Social Services. As Chairman of the Board I was honored to welcome them to Washington, and that year received their permission to tell their story.

"Refugee" has been an unwelcome word in our national vocabulary these last 4 years. But it has always been a special word for God's Church, because our Lord Jesus had to flee for his life when Herod sought to kill him. Our Lord Jesus spent some part of His childhood as a refugee in Egypt, where someone made the holy family at least safe, perhaps welcome. We Who are His children will always have a mission from Him to make the refugee safe and welcome. I give thanks to God before you today that LSS is still doing that holy work all around us today.

St. Paul understood the Magi and the star as part of the reason for His mission to the Gentiles. Paul knew tangibly and powerfully that Jesus had summoned him to bring saving news to the Gentiles. In former times, Paul says in our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson, the people of the nations did not know that the God of Israel was in love with them, and did not know that Jesus was a Savior for all people. Paul set out to tell them. And he took that Gospel to every corner of the Roman Empire, even to the Praetorian, who guarded the Emperor.

We are the children of those lost sheep of the nations that Apostles and evangelists and missionaries told. The mystery that God loves all is no longer hidden, and baptism still unites lost sinners to the Body of Christ. And yet if there is any sin that should shame us today, it is the littleness of our zeal to tell yet one more. Here again we worship and adore the One bathed in gold, frankincense and myrrh, but most of us do not ache for those who do not yet know Him, who will be lost without Him.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent I reminded you that God chose to bring salvation into our lives by sending His only Son to be born from a young virgin girl named Mary. God chose that way to come to us. God also chose to spread the news of Jesus' grace and mercy by the stumbling and often inadequate words and deeds of people as ordinary as Mary and you and me. That someone told me, showed me, loved me with Christ-like love, is why I can adore Him today. Someone told you also. Another showed you what His love is like. Our holy faith came through their witness. And this Gospel goes out to the nations when each of us obey His command and love one more. That God should love one like me moves me to tell another of His love.

I am grateful to so many who have shared Jesus with me. They are each part of my story. Several years ago, after a most difficult call on one of our seniors who had severe dementia, I was coming down the elevator feeling pretty blue about how badly that visit had gone. A black African nurse's aid got on at the next floor, and enthusiastically greeted me. In the next millisecond she looked at me and said, **"Father, you look like your best friend just died. Well if He loved Jesus, He's home now. Come on, let me give you a hug from Jesus."** And she did.

I was speechless. Very Lutheran, very reserved. But she wasn't. That hug from Jesus hasn't gone away. That is the mission before us: to love Jesus by telling folks this incredible tidings. **"We are the Light of the World."** Jesus' light is in us. Don't put your light under a cover!! Let it shine like

Epiphany's star so those around us will ask, "Where is the One born you serve, for we have seen His Light shining in you and wish to worship Him also!"

*HYMN OF THE DAY #396 Arise and Shine in Splendor*

- 1 Arise and shine in splendor;  
Let night to day surrender.  
Your light is drawing near.  
Above, the day is beaming,  
In matchless beauty gleaming;  
The glory of the Lord is here.**
  
- 2 See earth in darkness lying,  
The heathen nations dying  
In hopeless gloom and night.  
To you the Lord of heaven—  
Your life, your hope—has given  
Great glory, honor, and delight.**
  
- 3 The world's remotest races,  
Upon whose weary faces  
The sun looks from the sky,  
Shall run with zeal untiring,  
With joy Your light desiring  
That breaks upon them from on high.**
  
- 4 Lift up your eyes in wonder—  
See, nations gather yonder  
From sin to be set free.  
The world has heard Your story;  
Her sons come to Your glory;  
Her daughters haste Your light to see.**
  
- 5 Your heart will leap for gladness  
When from the realms of sadness  
They come from near and far.  
Your eyes will wake from slumber  
As people without number  
Rejoice to see the Morning Star.**

*NICENE CREED*

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

*OFFERING*    *Arise and Shine in Splendor*    Setting: G. Winston Cassler

*PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH*

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace of the whole world, and for the light of Christ to lead the people of the world in the path of peace, now that the light has appeared, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house and for all who in faith, piety and love come to receive Christ's gifts and praise His name, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For Matthew, our Synod president; John, our district president; Andrew, our circuit visitor; and all pastors and congregations, including ours, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all families and homes, that they may be blessed with good health and happiness in this new year, and that one generation may tell to the next the wonderful works of God in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For Donald, our president; Ralph, our governor; our legislature and Congress; all our elected and appointed leaders; and our diplomats and military, that they would be protected in their work and serve with integrity, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For an end to the pandemic, for safety while we wait, for endurance amidst the difficulty of safety measures, and for understanding and peace among peoples with varying needs and ideas, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our catechumens and for all who are new to the faith, that they may be encouraged in their learning and grow in repentance, faith and holy living, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all women with child and all parents with young children, that they would know great joy in this season and be kept safe from all harm and danger, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick and sorrowful, for those who mourn, and for all who stand in need of our prayers, [*especially \_\_\_\_\_*,] let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who commune this day, that they would receive our Lord's body and blood in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins and in the unity of a true confession, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we here remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Praising His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one 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 trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

*BENEDICTION*

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord make His face shine on us  
and be gracious to us.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

*SENDING HYMN #394 Songs of Thankfulness and Praise*

**1 Songs of thankfulness and praise,  
Jesus, Lord, to Thee we raise,  
Manifested by the star  
To the sages from afar,  
Branch of royal David's stem  
In Thy birth at Bethlehem:  
Anthems be to Thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.**

- 2 Manifest at Jordan's stream,  
Prophet, Priest, and King supreme;  
And at Cana wedding guest  
In Thy Godhead manifest;  
Manifest in pow'r divine,  
Changing water into wine;  
Anthems be to Thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.
- 3 Manifest in making whole  
Palsied limbs and fainting soul;  
Manifest in valiant fight,  
Quelling all the devil's might;  
Manifest in gracious will,  
Ever bringing good from ill;  
Anthems be to Thee addressed,  
God in man made manifest.
- 4 Sun and moon shall darkened be,  
Stars shall fall, the heav'ns shall flee;  
Christ will then like lightning shine,  
All will see His glorious sign;  
All will then the trumpet hear,  
All will see the Judge appear;  
Thou by all wilt be confessed,  
God in man made manifest.
- 5 Grant us grace to see Thee, Lord,  
Present in Thy holy Word—  
Grace to imitate Thee now  
And be pure, as pure art Thou;  
That we might become like Thee  
At Thy great epiphany  
And may praise Thee, ever blest,  
God in man made manifest.

#### *ANNOUNCEMENTS*

#### *DISMISSAL*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*POSTLUDE*    *Songs of Thankfulness and Praise*    Setting: Jan Bender

#### **Acknowledgments**

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