

Epiphany

January 4, 2026

10:15 am

Prelude

Announcements

Welcome

Family of Faith, good morning and Merry Christmas! Whether this is your first time with us or your hundredth time, we are so glad you are here.

You may have noticed that our worship setup is a bit unique this morning. Instead of worshiping in pews, we are worshiping around tables. Instead of facing the front, we are facing one another. Instead of listening to one person do a lot of talking, we're going to listen to each other.

And the reason we are doing all of this is because Epiphany Sunday deserves something special.

So this morning we will break bread and sing. We will pray and listen. We will gather together, and God will meet us here, for surely God is in this space.

A few logistical notes to help you orient yourself to this space:

Later in the service we will eat together, so know that we will have dedicated time for breaking bread soon.

There is coffee and water located by the kitchen. Please help yourself as you need.

If you spill something or drop crumbs, count it as holy proof of our gathering here. Do not fret.

God is with us, even in the messes.

Friends, with that in mind, I invite you to join me in the Call to Worship. Let us go now to God in prayer:

Call to Worship

In worship, we hear God's story and we ask,

"What did God do long ago?"

In worship, we hear God's story, so we ask,

"What is God doing, here and now?"

In worship, we hear God's story, then we ask,

"What can I do to respond to it all?"

Listen, God is speaking.

Listen, it may be time to act.

Let us worship our moving, inspiring, with-us God. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Friends, on this Epiphany Sunday we stand at the start of a new year, and there is nothing better about a new year than the chance to begin again. That is exactly what we do in the Prayer of Confession. We speak honestly with God and God surrounds us with grace. We are able to begin again. So may we start this new year, this new season, this new week with God's grace. Let us pray. Let us begin again.

Prayer of Confession

Ever-loving God, we long for Christmas to usher in a season of peace and joy. However, we know that is not how the world works. Even just days after Christmas, we find ourselves face to face with fear once again. So today we pray—forgive us when we allow fear to stop us in our tracks. Forgive us when our own fear prevents us from following your call. Forgive us when fear is louder than love. Show us how to turn our fear into action. Show us how to live like the magi who searched for you in a fearful world. With hope we pray, amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Family of Faith, whether you are brave and courageous or fearful and timid, God's love for you knows no end. So join me in these words of forgiveness:

Whether fear inspires us to action, or stops us dead in our tracks, God's love for us is boundless. We are seen. We are surrounded with grace. We are sent to serve. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Gathering Hymn: ELW #296 "What Child Is This"

1. **What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!**
2. **Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading. Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you; hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!**
3. **So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him. The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him. Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby; joy, joy, the Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!**

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Prayer of the Day & Blessing for the Meal

In a few moments, we will break bread together. Once everyone has been served and we are all settled at our tables, we will hear scripture read and proclaimed and spend some time engaging in conversation together as we eat. So let us now pray a blessing

for our food as we also invite God to speak to us through today's scripture and our conversations together.

God of the Stars, like the magi, we come to this place searching for you. So today, just like every day, we ask that you would remove any barricades that keep us from your Spirit. Clear out the distractions. Wipe away the doubt. Open up our hearts, and speak to us through these ancient words. And as you do, we will keep walking. As you do, we will move toward you.

There is a Latin American prayer that says: Thank you God for the bread. To those who have hunger, give bread. To those who have bread, give a hunger for justice. Thank you God for this food, and the hands that prepared it. Help it nourish our bodies so we can continue to do your work of serving our neighbors and working towards justice and love. With hope we pray. **Amen.**

Reading

Gospel Acclamation

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew starting with the 2nd Chapter. **Glory to you O Lord.**

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-23

The Visit of the Magi

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi^[a] 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^[b] 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^[c] 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^[d] my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi^[e] 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, ^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, ^[g] 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.

¹³ Now 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." ¹⁴ Then Joseph^[h] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt ¹⁵ and 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."

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,^[i] 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 magi.^[i] ¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

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."

¹⁹ When 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." ²¹ Then Joseph^[k] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling 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. ²³ There 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 Nazarene."^[l]

Breakfast & Table Discussion

In lieu of a sermon, we will spend about 20 minutes reflecting on the scripture reading, using the conversation prompts provided.

- When you hear the story of the Holy Family fleeing political persecution, how does it make you feel? Does it make you think of any current or historical events?
- We often skip the story of Herod's persecution and the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt. Why do you think that is? What do we lose if we don't read and know about this text?
- There is so much suffering in the world. What is one organization, non-profit, or grassroots movement that inspires you?
- Where and how do you see our congregation making a difference in the world? Where can we grow in this next year and the years to come?
- The scripture of the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt is a story that stirs up compassion for refugees. When it comes to the work of justice, compassion, and peace, what other causes or movements are you invested in?

- The theme for this morning is, "Let fear fire a fuel for justice." How can we move from fear to action? How do we not let fear stop us in our tracks?

After the conversation, wrap up with the Epiphany Commentary from Rev. Dr. Boyoung Lee-

We arrive at the end of the Advent and Christmas journey, and yet the world still brims with violence, uncertainty, and fear. The birth of Christ has not silenced the Herods of the world. Empire continues to rage. The innocent still suffer.

The question, then, is not whether fear exists— but what we do with it. Do we freeze? Flee? Or move forward, as the magi did, refusing to let fear be the end of the story? Matthew's account of the magi is often domesticated in popular retellings: exotic kings bearing gifts, bowing before a glowing infant. But Matthew 2 is no fairytale. It is a political and theological narrative. From the first verse, we are reminded: this story takes place "In the time of King Herod" (Matthew 2:1a), a puppet ruler of the Roman Empire known for violent paranoia. Herod represents the worst of power— one who responds to threat not with humility, but tyranny.

The massacre of the innocents in verses 16-18, echoing Pharaoh's infanticide in Exodus 1, shows how fear—untransformed—can mutate into mass violence. Into this volatile landscape enter the magi. They are foreign, Gentile, astrologers— marginal figures in Jewish imagination, yet the first to recognize Christ's birth. Matthew calls them *magoi apo anatolōn*—magi from the East— without specifying number, gender, or religion. Christian tradition has masculinized and royalized them—"three kings"— but the term *magoi* comes from Old Persian,²⁴ and in Zoroastrian tradition, both men and women could hold this title.

Their journey disrupts not only imperial geography but also gender, racial, and theological boundaries. Their epiphany is one of radical inclusion. In seeking and honoring the Christ child, they embody the very logic of Matthew's Gospel— a divine movement outside expected places and people, away from centers of power.

Matthew's Gospel consistently places God's activity on the margins. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem. He is hailed by Gentile astrologers, not the religious elite. He is protected not by armies, but by dreams and a refugee father who listens to angels.

This is a different kind of kingdom—a subversion of imperial logic. The magi recognize the infant Jesus as "King of the Jews," a title that terrifies Herod. Their homage is not merely devotional— it is political. By kneeling before Jesus, they make a bold and embodied declaration: their loyalty lies not with empire, but with the vulnerable child who reveals another way of power. Fear permeates this story. Herod is afraid. Jerusalem trembles. Yet the magi do not turn back. They travel through uncertainty, seeking truth.

After encountering Christ, they return home "by another way"—a phrase signifying not just a new route, but a transformed life. This is the power of epiphany: not merely a moment of recognition, but the beginning of a new path. The magi become witnesses to

God's new order— not by heritage or status, but through their bold seeking. While the religious elites remain static, the magi cross boundaries, bow in humility, and respond to revelation. They do what Herod and his allies refuse to do: seek, kneel, and listen.

Epiphanies are not always warm or personal. Sometimes they are disruptive, even dangerous. Sometimes they lead to confrontation with empire. Sometimes they ask us to cross borders. Sometimes they send us home by another way. And always, they ask something of us: Will we move the way fear makes us move? Or will we move the way love calls us to? Their journey becomes an invitation to us as well.

Who are the magi among us today— those willing to cross borders for truth and love? Who are the Marys, holding the Christ child in fragile arms, waiting for a knock at the door? Who are the Herods, terrified their illegitimate power might be exposed by the light? In the face of fear, let us travel together. Let us defy empire not with swords, but with solidarity. Let us kneel in awe, not before the powerful, but before the powerless Christ, whose birth marks the beginning of God's peace campaign. Let us believe, with trembling hope, that fear does not have the last word.

Because fear doesn't stop us. Love leads us forward.

Hymn of the Day: ELW #510 "Word of God, Come Down on Earth"

- 1. Word of God, come down on earth, living rain from heav'n descending;
touch our hearts and bring to birth faith and hope and love unending.
Word almighty, we revere you; Word made flesh, we long to hear you.**
- 2. Word eternal, throned on high, Word that brought to life creation, Word
that came from heav'n to die, crucified for our salvation, saving Word, the
world restoring, speak to us, your love outpouring.**
- 3. Word that speaks God's tender love, one with God beyond all telling, Word
that sends us from above God the Spirit, with us dwelling, Word of truth,
to all truth lead us; Word of life, with one bread feed us.**

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Affirmation of Faith

We have seen the valley.

We have seen a sky without stars.

We have seen the longest night, and *still* we believe.

We believe in a with-us God.

We believe in the hope of tomorrow.

We believe that good news is louder than fear.

We believe this good news is for all people.

So even when our knees shake, even when our voice trembles, even when fear is all around us, we will hold onto that good news.

We will reach for each other.

We will look for God in our midst.

We will sing songs of joy.

We will proclaim: *Unto us, love is born.*

We have seen the longest night, and we have seen unimaginable love. So *still*, we believe. Amen.

Sharing of Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you all. **And also with you.**

Invitation to Prayer

It is a prayer practice in churches all over the world to give people a star word on Epiphany Sunday. There are many reasons behind this tradition. First, we know that the magi followed a star, which ultimately led them to Jesus. Therefore, we too use all the resources we have available to us—including creative prayer practices and intention words for the new year—to move closer to Jesus.

Secondly, we trust that God uses multiple ways to guide us and speak to us. Star words offer a tool to actively seek and reflect on God’s presence among us, both in the moment and in hindsight. We recognize that it is often easy to miss God throughout our daily lives. Having an intention word to consider both in present days, as well as to reflect on at the end of the year, allows us to see God in ways we may not have seen God before. This is the greatest gift.

Finally, we know that the most common prayer practice for many involves speaking to God as opposed to silence or contemplation. However, this practice invites a new prayer rhythm of reflection and review that can be a powerful way to connect with God. So in just a moment, you will be invited to select a star word. Consider this a guiding word for the year ahead. We invite you to remember your star word often, seeking the ways God might be moving through the meanings and definitions the word contains. However, as we prepare our hearts and minds for this centering moment, let us pray. . .

Prayers of the People

Beckoning God, from every corner we have come looking for you. A thousand monsters reared their heads along the way, threatening to derail us. But we are here nonetheless. We have gone over, around, under, and through our fear. And when we faced fears we couldn’t evade, we took that fear by the hand and dragged it along with us on the journey, because we will stop at nothing to follow you. Your star calls us forward, ever forward toward our convictions, toward our dreams, toward a world that reflects your justice, peace, and love, toward our belonging in the great family of creation. Your star calls us forward, and the gifts that await are too great to hand over to fear. We pray now for those living in fear- in body, mind, or soul. We pray especially today for Arlen, Lan-Shiang, Deb, Ruth, Barry, Monica, Dennis, Nathan, Sue and Donna Richards, the family of Beverly Devoe and the Hruska family.

May we find courage and strength for the journey in these star words we are about to receive. When fear threatens to stop us, may we hold onto these words and remember what lies ahead. When the journey is challenging, lift our heads to see our companions on the journey and the shining star that lights the way. You go with us, and if you are with us, what shall we fear? Beckoning God, we follow you into the unknown, with heads held high or knees quaking in fear. When the way ahead is unsure, we return to what we

know: You are Emmanuel, God-With-Us.

Instructions for Receiving Star Words

I will pass this basket around this table. We invite you to draw out a star word, without looking at it first, and then pass the basket to your neighbor. As you do, you may say to one another, "May Christ's light guide you." When we all receive our word, we'll pray, and then sit together in moment of silence, to reflect and ponder the significance of our word in our lives. Friends, God is always calling us forward. Let us hold our fear gently as we respond to the invitation.

Prayer

Holy God, you always show up. Even in our fear, even in times of uncertainty, even when we can't seem to take the next step, you are with us. You are behind us, before us, and beside us, hemming us in with your love. As we sit with these star words, open our hearts to the wisdom they hold. Keep our minds nimble and flexible, awake to the constellation of meanings we may find in a single word. May they challenge us, comfort us, and call us forward. Let these words be a reminder of your presence with us. May they give us courage and guidance for the year ahead. Let them shine in the dark, pointing us toward you. And at the end of this year, may we look back at the paths we took and see how in every moment, you journeyed with us. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Pause for brief silence.

Offering and Offertory Hymn: ELW #253 "He Came Down"

- 1. He came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; he came down that we may have love; hallelujah forevermore.**

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Offering Prayer

God of healing and hope, you bless those who are hungry, promising to fill them with good things. Fulfill that promise through us and these your gifts. Nourish us with the abundance of your feast and unite us into the blessed body of Jesus Christ our Savior, now and forever. Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving

With-us God, We live in a fearful world. If we're honest, we come to this Table today with the taste of fear on our tongues. We come to this Table carrying our anxiety. We come to this Table asking for guidance. We come to this Table with all of life's "what-ifs."

But you do not disregard our fear. You do not brush it under the rug or call us foolish. You do not ignore the realities in front of us. You do not dish out hurtful platitudes, telling us to "toughen up" or "power through." Instead, you meet us here. You listen to our fears. You remind us that we are not alone. You surround us with people who love us. You show us where we are strong. You walk beside us. So today we pray, gracious God: replace the fear on our tongues with these words of hope:

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

As we come to this Table, pour out your Spirit on this bread and cup. Remind us that even in a fearful world, you are on the move. Remind us that even in a fearful world, you are here, inviting us to the Table, nourishing our spirits, reminding us that we belong, calling us by name.

Instill that good news in us, for this is a joyful feast. Fear is not the loudest voice today. What a gift that is. Now with hope for a better tomorrow, we join our voices together to pray the prayer your son taught us to pray, saying. . .

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.

Invitation to the Table

Here at this Table, there is enough room, enough food, enough love for everyone. Here at this Table, Jesus is standing up on his chair, waving his hands over his head, saying to each of you, "I saved you a seat!" Here at this Table, you are wanted and welcomed. You are safe and loved. Here at this Table, you belong. So my friends, there is no need for fear here, for this is a joyful feast. And you are invited.

Today, we will be communing one another at our tables. The elements are set out for you- I'll begin by communing the first person at the table, and then we'll pass the elements down, communing the person sitting next to us with the words "The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you." The cups in the middle are grape juice for those who need them, the others are wine. The last person will then commune me. Come. All are welcome.

Distribution Hymn: ELW #294 "In The Bleak Midwinter"

- 1. In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak mid-winter, long ago.**
- 2. Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; heav'n and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign; in the bleak mid-winter a stable sufficed the Lord God almighty Jesus Christ.**

3. What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb; if I were a wise man I would do my part; yet what I can I give him -- give my heart.

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Prayer after Communion

Loving God, In a world racked with fear, you gather us together. You set the table. You meet us here. You nourish our bodies as you nourish our spirits. You remind us that this is a joyful feast, and that fear cannot win every time. So with renewed courage, with renewed hope, with renewed conviction, send us out into the world. Help us to feed others as you have fed us. With gratitude we pray, amen.

Benediction

In a fearful world, may you look for God's spirit. May you reach for each other's hands. May you choose courage whenever you can. And in all things, may you remember that good news is louder than fear. In the name of the one who calls, the one who sends, and the one who journeys with—go in peace and *be not afraid*. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: ELW #857 "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High"

Lord, I lift your name on high; Lord, I love to sing your praises.
I'm so glad you're in my life, I'm so glad you came to save us.
You came from heaven to earth to show the way, from earth to the cross,
my debt to pay, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky:
Lord, I lift your name on high. (*Sing Twice*)

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Dismissal

Go in peace. Do not fear.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude

 **Calvary's Annual Meeting** will be held on Sunday, January 18, 2026 following worship. In the event there is bad weather on that day, we will hold the Annual Meeting on the following Sunday, January 25, 2026 following worship.

 **Prayers:** Please continue to keep our members and loved ones in your prayers, including Arlen, Lan-Shiang, Deb, Ruth, Barry, Monica, Dennis, Nathan, Sue and Donna Richards, the family of Beverly Devoe and the Hruska family.

 **Weather Related Closings:** Please tune into KEYC TV.

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