

Hybrid Worship for January 1, 2023
New Year's Day Worship Celebrating Epiphany

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Carol: "Ding Dong Merrily on High"

Ding dong merrily on high,
In heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! verily the sky
Is riv'n with angel singing
Gloria - Hosanna in excelsis! *(repeat)*

E'en so here below, below,
Let steeple bells be swungen,
And "Io, io, io!"
By priest and people sungen
Gloria - Hosanna in excelsis! *(repeat)*

Pray you, dutifully prime
Your matin chime, ye ringers,
May you beautifully rhyme
Your eve'time song, ye singers
Gloria - Hosanna in excelsis! *(repeat)*

Call to Worship and Opening Prayer:

One: A New Year begins, and the future beckons,
All: and we wonder what new things God will have in store for us.
One: A New Year is set in motion,
All: and we ponder what new experiences God has ready for us.
One: A New Year commences,
All: and we gather with anticipation and joy.
bells are rung
One: Come and worship our God of new beginnings,
our God of light and love.
All: We gather at the cusp of this New Year –

ready and open to being and seeing God's light in the world!

One: Let's pray together:

**All: Holy God, as we enter this New Year,
we thank you for your presence with us
in all the years of our lives.
We have known joy, and also sorrow,
success and failure,
and through it all, you have been with us—
the companion on all of our journeys.
Like the Wise Ones who traveled by your light,
may we continue to walk a path of faith
that is illuminated by your love.
Amen**

Opening Hymn: "The First Noel" VU 91 Verses 1-4

The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay akeeping their sheep
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star,
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

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

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest;
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay,

right over the place where Jesus lay.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

Prayer for Reflection and Revelation: “A New Year’s Prayer”

Holy One, Timeless One,
Beloved God, in whom we live and move and have our being,
here we are, paused at the threshold of a new year.
We reflect back upon all that was woven together in the past year:
threads of sorrow, threads of joy,
threads of doubt, threads of hope,
threads of disappointment, threads of wonder,
threads of fear, threads of celebration,
and, reflected in each thread,
we discover your presence.
There is nothing that happened,
no piece woven into the fabric of this past year,
that has not been touched by your compassion.
Now we turn toward the new year,
a fabric yet to be woven, a tale yet to be told.
We wonder what will be.
We dare to have hopes and dreams.
We try to hold back our worries and fears.
Yet, once again, we discover that you are out ahead of us,
already present in whatever the new year may bring.
But for now, we have *now*. It is all we ever have.
This moment, *now*, a fragile, wondrous gift,
held in your compassionate hands.
And so, as this new year begins,
we offer to you this *now*, this gift of a moment
that will be woven with many other moments,
gradually creating the fabric that will be this new year.
We cross over the threshold into the new year,
trusting the faith that has guided us to this moment,
and trusting the wisdom we have come to know in Jesus,
that you are with us; we are not alone.
In the coming moments and days,
may we reflect hope in this world,
peace for others, joy in our living,
and love that is expansive.
Beloved God, in whom we live and move and have our being,

we move into this new year, open to possibility and promise,
and ready to courageously be your presence in this world. Amen.

Written by: Susan Lukey. Used with permission. The United Church of Canada.

Sung Response: "I Am the Light of the World" VU 87 Chorus

"I am the light of the world!

You people come and follow me!"

If you follow and love

you'll learn the mystery

of what you were meant to do and be.

Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6

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 on their nurses' arms.

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.

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.

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been

written by the prophet:

“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.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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.’ 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection: Journeying in the Light

Hymn: “Will You Come and See the Light” VU 96 Verses 1 - 4

Will you come and see the light from the stable door?
It is shining newly bright, though it shone before.
It will be your guiding star,
it will show you who you are;
will you hide, or decide to meet the light?

Will you step into the light that can free the slave?
It will stand for what is right, it will heal and save.
By the pyramids of greed
there's a longing to be freed;
will you hide, or decide to meet the light?

Will you tell about the light in the prison cell?
Though it's shackled out of sight, it is shining well.
When the truth is cut and bruised,
and the innocent abused,
will you hide, or decide to meet the light?

Will you join the hope, alight in the young girl's eyes,
of the mighty put to flight by a baby's cries?
When the lowest and the least

are the foremost at the feast,
will you hide, or decide to meet the light?

Introduction to the Offering:

Song of Dedication: "In The Bleak Midwinter" VU 55 verse 4

What can I give him – poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise one, I would do my part,
But what I can, I give him –
Give him my heart.

Offering Prayer:

One: Loving God,
like the Magi who approached the child Jesus,
we follow a star of hope,

**All: We come with awe and wonder,
we bring gifts—
ourselves, our time, and our commitment.**

One: Send us home a different way,
changed by coming here.

**All: Changed by what we have given and received.
Amen**

Prayers of the People: Always Emmanuel by John Harvey

God, above time, above space,
yet with us and in us is Christ,
we who are creatures of time and space
come to you today
with thankfulness.

We give you thanks
for the year that has passed.
We thank you
for the many ways in which you have touched us,
in moments of great happiness
or in deep distress.
You have been present in Christ,
the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.

We thank you
for the people who matter to us,
near and far,
who have given themselves to us
and through whom you have
been present to us
in their love.

We thank you for your church,
the community of faith
in whose company we have journeyed,
whose friendship we value,
whose challenge we welcome,
and whose wide boundaries
are not defined by time, by space or by death.

As we move on now into a new year,
give us grace
to leave behind our regrets and our failures
and any sense of guilt,
to let go of the past with gratitude,
and to leave in your hands the future in faith --
to live each moment
in joyful discipleship,
in the company of him
who is always Emmanuel,
God with us.
Amen

The Lord's Prayer (sung) VU 959

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.

Closing Hymn: “A Light is Gleaming” VU 82

A light is gleaming,
spreading its arms
throughout the night,
living in the light.
Come share its gladness,
God's radiant love is burning bright,
living in the light.

When light comes pouring into the darkest place,
it hurts our eyes to see the glow.
Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,
our memories and tears.

A light is gleaming,
spreading its arms
throughout the night,
living in the light.

When night is round us and every shadow grows,
a star is there to light our way.
It tells a story of Jesus, who came near to say:
“God’s light will ever stay.”

A light is gleaming,
spreading its arms
throughout the night,
living in the light.

So let us live in the brightness God has giv’n,
and let us rise to see the dawn.
We trust that God is here a sparkle and ablaze,
warming all our days.

A light is gleaming,
spreading its arms
throughout the night,
living in the light.

Commissioning/Benediction:

Sung Amen VU967

Rev Joanne's Reflection

Happy New Year 2023! There are many ways to mark this change of the calendar, some of us will feast or visit with friends or family, some of us may have attended a party last evening, or stayed up until midnight to celebrate the New Year with a toast or a sleepy greeting to others. Our present calendar, the Gregorian Calendar, was adopted only about two-hundred and seventy years ago, based upon the Julian Calendar created in 45 BCE which set the New year to begin on January 1st to honour the God Janus, who looked both forward and backward. Humankind has been measuring the progression of time through the turning of the seasons for perhaps ten-thousand years or more.

One of the popular traditions of commemorating the New Year is to make resolutions – promises to ourselves to exercise more or begin a new hobby, change our financial habits or even our dietary ones. That practice too is ancient, recorded first in Babylon over four thousand years ago.

So I wonder, did those wise ones – those travelers from the east – did they make their journey as some kind of New Year's resolution? We don't know very much about them at all, other than the fact that they watched the stars for signs and changes. The original Greek word for them was *magi*, the term referring to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science. Tradition – not the bible – has given them the names Melchior, a Persian scholar, Gaspar, an Indian King, and Balthazar who is sometimes called a king and sometimes a Babylonian scholar.

Whoever they may have been, and however many of them actually made the journey to Bethlehem, we believe that they were following a light hung in the sky by God, a star of wonder but also celebration, a guiding light. Those travelers put their faith in that sign from God, and made a journey that seemed to have changed their lives. It was also a journey that confirmed Jesus as a king, as the one who had come to lead his people and deserving of honour and gifts.

So one of the things we are fairly certain about in regards to those wise ones, those travelers and scholars, is that they were actively looking for signs in the world, especially in the realm of light. Perhaps they did not name God as the source of that special starlight, but their dedication to the task, and their openness to finding and seeing those signs in the world can be an inspiration for us.

I think it can be quite challenging for us to see the signs of God's hope, promise, justice and love in our world today. We are bombarded by images and sights in the media – however we participate. We are constantly being confronted by advertisements and forms of entertainment, and it can be difficult to separate what is fact from what may be conjecture or even untruth. So it can be especially difficult to spot those signs – those flickers of light in the skies of our daily lives.

So perhaps we do what the wise ones did – we remain vigilant and watchful, and remain open to the possibility that God does indeed give us points of light to follow, often in the form of unique and dedicated individuals. You may already have people in this community, or in the world, that you admire or that point you to God's presence in our world or in your living. Today, I'd like to offer some other bright lights that I feel can help us to find the way.

You may remember Ryan Slobojan, who visited us on the first Sunday of January in 2019. Ryan brought a message and a plan – a response to the murders at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City. He wanted us to join others across the country to push back the darkness of hate by lighting candles in our windows on the anniversary of the shootings. His actions and words brought a different kind of illumination to our understanding of God's love for all.

I have mentioned Greta Thunberg in my reflections at other times – the young Swedish climate activist who has gained the attention of young people, world leaders, and more as she speaks truth about the perils our planet is facing. Her light is at times a scorching flame, but points us to our own responsibilities to “live with respect in creation” and to honour the earth home that God has created, and protect it in every way we can.

When we think of the light of truth, we might remember Kyle Beach, who bravely spoke out about the abuse he suffered during his years playing professional hockey. His light is perhaps uncomfortably bright for some of us, but it is so often needed in a world that wants to hide that discomfort in the shadows. Truth is a light that is often too intense for many, but we are also called by God to seek, find and share the truth of those who have been marginalized.

Especially we could remember our Indigenous siblings who continue to bring their own truths into the light – and our need to respond to the radiance of truth-telling. So individuals like Siila Watt-Cloutier, Mary Simon, Murray Sinclair, or Autumn Peltier and others create a constellation of lights for us to follow to find our way into creating God’s justice for all.

The illumination that people can provide does not only come from those who capture our attention in newspaper headlines or other media. Nick Saul is a light for me – a man whose life work has involved feeding the hungry and creating supportive community around good and healthy community food centres. Presently, he is the CEO of Community Food Centres Canada, an organization that creates and nurtures spaces where people can grow, cook, share, and advocate for good food for all.

A final bright light for me is a young woman named Maayan Ziv. Maayan was born with a form of Muscular Dystrophy, and has been a wheelchair user since childhood. Living in and navigating the streets of Toronto as a person with unique accessibility needs, she saw the need for help in knowing what locations were actually accessible to her. She created an ‘app’ called Access Now, which allows users to find restaurants, office buildings and other locations that they can visit and be comfortable. This accomplishment is certainly light-bringing, but it is Maayan herself who shines brightly as an accomplished photographer, an inspirational speaker, and a determined problem-solver who is not afraid to advocate for others with physical challenges.

Each of those I have mentioned have brought illumination to me – have pointed me to deeper contemplation about how God wants me to live, and inspired me to both shine brighter in my own faith, but also to make space for those whose unique brightness needs to be seen.

Perhaps that is what those eastern travelers understood, seeing and following the light will not leave us the same as we were, we will be changed both by the glow and by our own reactions to it. Like them, perhaps we can offer gifts. Not gold or frankincense or myrrh, but our attention and our actions to bring God’s justice, peace, inclusivity and love to everyone and to creation.

Look for the light, it is there. Expect God’s illumination to be found in the people we encounter or hear about. Follow the light, and encounter the presence of God. Amen