

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for Epiphany
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
January 3, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Kling, Glöckchen” (Ring, Little Bells)

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church as we celebrate Epiphany, the day the magi come to visit the Christ child.

Announcements: First, we have an organ pipe that is out for repair, so if you notice that during our worship, never fear; it will be back soon.

For the next two Sundays, we will be having joint worship with Delmar Presbyterian Church. Next Sunday, January 10, Delmar will be hosting worship as a live stream at 10:00 a.m. We will be sending out a link to that service so it should be easy to watch their worship. On Sunday, January 17, our church will be hosting and we will be welcoming our brothers and sisters to watch our recorded worship service that day.

Also, we will be having our annual meeting on Sunday, January 24, at 11:00 a.m. via Zoom. For those who write reports for the Annual Report, we ask that you email them to the church office by this Thursday, January 7.

Since it is the first Sunday of the month, we will be celebrating communion in this service, so you are invited to gather elements to participate. Jesus sat at a dinner table with his friends, and used elements common to them: bread and wine. You are invited to use elements that are common to your table – bread or cracker or chip; and juice or wine or other drink, even water will do. You might set these on a special cloth and include a candle or flower or something to welcome guests to a meal. You may add a photo of someone you love. Take a moment to gather those elements.

Call to Worship

Isaiah 60:1, 3

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
Nations shall come to your light and rulers to the brightness of your rising.

Hymn

Choir

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory” #22 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

God of blessing, you have come to us in Jesus Christ, fulfilling your Word through the prophets. But we lose interest quickly, focusing on the next problem, or the next deadline, or the next thing to worry about. We are caught up in the frenzy of the world, distracted by loud voices, false promises, and easy answers. Your voice is drowned out, and your light is hidden in our shadows. Continue to call to us, O God, and gather us from our far places. Lift our heads to see Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Show us your mercy and remind us that in you we have life abundant. Take away our fear, and fill us with wonder. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ: the angels said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid;” at the empty tomb the angels said to the women, “Do not be afraid;” and Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” God understands our fears, and the love of God brings courage to our hearts. Come out of your darkness, into God’s light, because you are loved by God, and forgiven by God, and offered a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD as 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.

⁴ 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. 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.

Kids’ Time

For those unable to see the video, there was a mistake in last week’s written worship. The children’s sermon for December 27 was about when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple for worship, and how Simeon and Anna recognized the baby is the one God had promised. They help us to know that God always keeps God’s promises, and, even if it takes a long time for the promise to come true, it is worth the wait. This week’s children’s sermon is about different symbols. The star that guided the magi reminds us that one symbol for God is light. Because of God’s light, we also want to be lights shining in the world. Now it’s time to see the photos that remind us of God’s love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your light that comes into the world. Help us to remember when we see a star that your light guides us. And help us to be a light to the people we meet. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Ephesians 3:1-12

¹ 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 to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 2:1-12

¹ 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 at its rising, 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 at its rising, 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.

Sermon

Even though today is still part of Christmas—the tenth day of Christmas—most everyone around us is no longer even thinking about the birth of the Messiah. Our society rushes us into Christmas long before it actually arrives and then promptly forgets it as soon as December 25 is done, or maybe until the last present is exchanged. But, as my clergy friend Steve says, it is okay that the rest of the world has got it all wrong. Let them obsess over decorating and buying presents. Because now the rush is over. Everyone is quiet and so we Christians, for whom Christmas is celebrated, can really savor these twelve days and give some thoughtful attention to the nativity of Christ.

Epiphany is on January 6, and it is only one day—a day we should pause over. The arrival of the magi shows us that people outside the Jewish faith recognized that Jesus is the one God had been promising to send to save the whole world.

The amazing thing about Epiphany is that these foreign travelers recognized this child as God's Chosen One. In all the Christmas stories we have read so far, everyone

who has been told there is something special about this child have been Israelites – they are all people of the Faith who knew that the Messiah was going to come. The angels came to Mary and Joseph, and then the shepherds to tell about Jesus’ birth. Last week we read the story of Simeon and Anna, two very religious and devout people in the Temple who recognized Jesus as the Christ.

But now we have these learned Magi, traveling from a foreign country, with a different religion and different customs, and they see this child and know that he is from God. Christmas may have first been celebrated by Christians, but Christ did not come for people of just one faith.

That message is in our other scripture readings this morning. Isaiah says that once God’s light is among the people, all nations will gather together. It says different nations and different kings will be drawn to the light of God. And Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says that the mystery of Christ means that the Gentiles are now members together, and heirs together with the people who have believed for so long.

That is a message worth pausing over. Jesus came into a world with nations at war and rulers desperately trying to hold onto whatever power they could get. When King Herod heard a new king had been born, he used all the wisdom at his disposal to find out where this child was so he could get rid of him. When the Magi did not return to tell him what they had found, Herod ordered that all children up to two years old should be killed! He was determined to rule the world in the way that he wanted it to be.

But God cannot be thwarted. As much darkness as we may see in the world, light is still more powerful than darkness. The question is whether we pay enough attention to notice the light. The foreign magi recognized the new light in the sky, and followed it for many days and many miles. But the king of the land where Jesus was born did not know anything about it; and even the chief priests and scribes were unaware – oh, they knew what the scriptures said would happen, but they did not realize that it had, in fact, happened.

Walter Brueggemann, the Old Testament scholar, says there is the difference of how we envision God is with us. The prophecy from Isaiah says that kings will arrive and camels with frankincense and myrrh. So, of course, all the people in power believe that they need to look for God in powerful people and powerful places.

In fact, that is just what the magi did – it seems they might have not followed the star exactly, because they should have ended up in Bethlehem. Instead, they seem to have done what many of us do when we do not quite trust our GPS. It says turn left, and we think, well, that can’t be right, so we keep going straight. The magi knew that they were looking for a new king, so they knew they should be headed for a palace, and even though the star may have been telling to head for the little town of Bethlehem, they went to Jerusalem to see the current king.

When the magi arrive, the scribes tell Herod about an alternative prophecy – they remember Micah saying, “In Bethlehem, God’s ruler will be born.” Bethlehem is a more modest place than Jerusalem. A baby lying in a feeding trough is quite a different way to get things done than through a powerful king on his throne. We see the way King Herod gets things done – slaughtering anyone who gets in his way; he is willing to do anything to be in control. But Micah tells us about a God who slips in at odd times, in odd places, taking the future out of our hands and away from our control. Between Isaiah and Micah, we have two different pictures of how God gets things done.

Most of the year we spend our time hearing stories about powerful people and powerful places – we are too-well acquainted with how the world gets things done. So what a luxury it is for us to have maybe just these twelve days to let God remind us how God gets things done. God is not headed for those with power and money and fame, God is turning left, to a little, out-of-the-way town, to people whose names have never been on the news.

Christmas and Epiphany give us the chance to see something new in the midst of all that is familiar. This season reminds us that God’s light can shine in humble places, places that powerful people are not even concerned about – like a star in the night sky, like a barn in the middle of nowhere, like a communion table we’ve come to a hundred times before.

God is still at work in the world. We are blessed to have time in these twelve days to see where God’s light is shining in our lives.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

“What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright” verses 1,2,3 #68 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, in this dark time of the year, we ask you to fill us with the light of your love. Look with love over the needs of this world. Watch over all those with governing power and touch them that they may care for those whose needs are great.

Healing God, watch over those who are sick in body, mind, and soul.

Prince of Peace, in this afterglow of Christmas, we pray for the absence of warfare among the nations. We are weary of anger and threats and violence and bloodshed as the response to conflict. Teach us your way of peace in our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, and our world.

Today we pray for all who are like King Herod. We pray for those who live in fear, who are threatened by goodness, who are so consumed by the darkness they cannot see the light. We commend them to your great love, O God, and we ask for courage in facing such dark powers in our world.

And we pray for all who are like the magi: those who revel in your creation, those who see signs of your presence, those from outside our faith, those who are strangers, and those who are searching for your light in the world. Grant us grace to welcome the seekers, and to listen to the story of your love always being born into this world.

And hear us as we say the prayer Jesus taught us:

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.

Communion

Today we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with elements that we have at our tables. We invite the Lord to all our tables, and he becomes our host. He invites everyone to take

part in this meal, so all are welcome. Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! People will come from east and west, and from north and south to sit at the Lord's table.

The Great Thanksgiving

Let us lift our hearts to the Lord, and offer our thanks and praise. Let us pray.

O God, of majesty and splendor, by your power, you created all that is, making a universe out of chaos, and ruling over all things in love. Throughout the ages you called your people to love and serve you, and to be your light among the nations.

When we failed you, you did not fail us, and sent prophets to call us back to your ways. We praise you that in the fullness of time, you revealed your love by sending your Son Jesus to be the Light of the world. He came to heal our brokenness and to set before us the ways of justice and peace.

Therefore, we praise you joining our voices with angels and archangels, and with all the faithful of every time and place, saying:

**Holy, 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 the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon your gifts, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit make us one with Christ that we may be one with all who share this feast, united in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.

Illumine our hearts, O God, with the radiance of Christ's presence, that our lives may show forth his love in this weary world. Teach us to befriend the lost, to serve the poor, to reconcile with our enemies, and to love our neighbors. Keep us faithful in your service until Christ comes in final victory, in the joy of your eternal realm.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory, praise, and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Breaking the Bread

{Break your bread as these words are said.}

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, sat with his friends at a dinner table. He took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

{Pour your drink into a cup, or, if already in a cup, lift the cup as these words are said.}

In the same way Jesus took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, which is poured out for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

{Lift up the bread and cup.}

Friends, the Body of Christ is broken for the life of the world. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Take; eat and drink the bread of heaven and the cup of new life.

Prayer After Communion

Eternal God, you have fed us with spiritual food in this sacrament. Give us strength and courage to be faithful disciples, so that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom. Fill us with your love that we may reach out into the life of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

“As with Gladness Men of Old” verses 1,2,3 #63 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

My friends, let us open our hearts, just like the magi when they saw the Christ child. Let us give from all the gifts God has given us.

Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries of doing God’s work in a broken world. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can offer is prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. We are blessed to share our gifts and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To God all glorious heavenly Light,
to Christ revealed in earthly night,
to God the Spirit now we raise
our joyful songs of thankful praise.

Benediction and Blessing

As we conclude our worship, set out anew on your journey of faith. Like the magi, may you see the light that will guide you, may you see Christ in our world, and may you be eager to see where Christ will lead you. Go with great joy, knowing that God is with us, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

“We Three Kings” verse 5 #66 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

“Kling, Glöckchen” (Ring, Little Bells)