

Sunday, January 3, 2021 Home Service
Epiphany

Welcome

We acknowledge the Passamaquoddy People and their stewardship of this land throughout the ages

Gathering Words

In the darkest night, a new day dawns.

In the coldest winter, bright light warms our hearts.

God's love brings us new beginnings

and God's wisdom lights the way.

Let us be glad! Let us sing praise! [Epiphany Sunday]

Music

As With Gladness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sp52sx2_GYs

Dix/Kocher sung by St Mary Le Tower Church, Ipswich UK finishing with a lovely descant

*As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold,
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright,
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore your splendour see.*

*As with joyful steps they sped,
to that lowly manger bed,
there to bend the knee before
Christ, whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with eager pace
ever seek your throne of grace.*

*As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger rude and bare,
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to you, our heavenly King.*

*Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way
And when earthly things are past bring our ransomed souls at last,
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds your glory hide.*

*In the heavenly country bright none shall need created light,
You its light, its joy, its crown, you its sun which goes not down,
There forever may we sing Hallelujah to our King.*



Celebration of Epiphany Light *light a candle or two or more if you can safely do*

Long ago a star spoke of holy Mystery, Wisdom and Power..

Today the world is still bright with holy mystery, wisdom and energy..

Long ago, by the light of that star, the wise ones found their way through strange and difficult landscape.

Today, a holy Light guides us beyond what we know into new landscapes of heart and soul.

Long ago, the wise ones discovered the child Jesus and saw the whole world in a new light.

Today, new life and new birth still show us the world in a new light..

Long ago, by the bright light of divine Presence, the wise ones travelled home by another way.

Today, the Spirit will light our way home, home with each other, home in God.

We find all the light we need because of that good news shining bright in Jesus and all who show and teach the way of divine justice and compassion..

Today, may we see a holy light in all persons, in all creation.. May we be light and life and joy to each other. Amen.

We Hear Words of Wisdom

Readings from Ancient and Modern Wisdom

Matthew 2:1-12. The visit of the Magi

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Music

We Three Kings

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lx35_DRIZ8g

[J.H. Hopkins] sung by Kings College Choir, Cambridge

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star*

chorus:

*Oh, star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light*

*Born a king on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign. chorus:*

*Frankincense to offer have I.
Incense owns a deity nigh.
Prayer and praising ever raising
Worshipping God most High. chorus:*

*Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breaths a life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb, chorus:*



The Legend of the Fourth Wise Man

Artaban lived in the mountains of ancient Persia. On the basis of his study of the planets and stars, he predicted the birth of a great King. He sold all his possessions in order to buy gifts for the King – a radiant blue sapphire, a perfect ruby and a spectacular pearl. He then began his journey to Jerusalem, where he had agreed to meet with three other wise men to seek out the new-born King.

The journey was difficult, with many hold-ups. One day he saw a man, clearly very ill, lying on the path, and, as Artaban turned away, the man begged for help. Artaban hesitated, because if he stayed to help a dying stranger even for a short while, he might miss his three friends. But if he turned away, the man would surely die. In compassion, he took care of the sick man until he began to get well.

“I do not have anything with which to pay you,” said the man, “... except this: our prophets have told us that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, not in Jerusalem. May God guide you there, because you nursed a man who was ill to the point of death.”

When Artaban reached the place where he was to meet his friends, he received a message to the effect that they had decided not to wait any longer, and that he should follow them across the desert. Artaban went back to Babylon and sold the sapphire so that he could buy camels and food for the journey.

He arrived in Bethlehem with his remaining gifts three days after the other wise men had found Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and had honoured the new-born King with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh

In a small house, he met a woman with her son. She told him that Joseph had taken Jesus and Mary, fleeing in secret, because Herod feared the King would take his throne, and was killing all male children. Even as the woman spoke, Herod’s soldiers could be heard coming to kill any male children they found. Artaban rushed to the door and held out the ruby to the soldier, who grabbed it, saying to his troop, “March on! There are no children here.”

Artaban was sad. “I have spent for man what was meant for God,” he said. “Will I ever be worthy to gaze on the face of the King?” Weeping for joy, the woman said, “You have saved my son’s life. May the Lord bless you, keep you, and give you peace.”

For thirty-three years, Artaban continued searching for the little family from Bethlehem. He was tired, worn out, ill and ready to die, but he kept on looking for the King. He came to Jerusalem. He heard that a great person was to be put to death that day. When people told him of this man’s life and teachings, Artaban realised that this man was the King. He made his way to Golgotha, hoping that his splendid pearl might purchase his King’s release. Then he saw a platoon of soldiers dragging a girl in chains behind them. “Save me; I am to be sold as a slave.”

The fourth wise man knew what he must do. He took the pearl from his purse. Never had it seemed so stunningly luminous, radiant; and he gave it for the girl’s freedom. He was immensely sad that he now had nothing to give his King, so sad that he collapsed with grief.

Then, in his half-conscious state, he recognised the gentle voice of his King: “Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. Insofar as you did it to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 34, 40).

Artaban’s journey was over. His gifts were accepted. He had found his King

Reflection

Travellers' Tales

Travellers tales of the season

Christmas and Epiphany bring us travellers' tales- tales that could not or should not happen in pandemic times.

Travel, brought the Black Death to Europe in the 14th century, wiping out 30 to 60 percent of Europe's population, as well as many in North Africa.

COVID got all around the world partly because these days we can travel so easily, covering distances our ancestors could not imagine,

The Christmas Travellers' tales

But travellers tales take many forms and have many meanings.

Did Mary and Joseph really travel to Bethlehem for Jesus' birth?

Or did storytellers need him to be born there to fulfil the Hebrew prophecies?

If such a journey happened, it wasn't anything like going home for Christmas-

Quite the reverse- And it was business, not pleasure.

The accommodations were mediocre- the menu problematic-

But travellers came visiting- on foot from their fields, in the middle of the dark night- nothing but the night sky and an angelic vision.

The shepherds' trip was pilgrimage-

To a humble place made sacred because of who had just been born there.

And-until this year-many pilgrims have followed them to spend Christmas in Bethlehem.

The Epiphany Travellers' tales; to Bethlehem

The next travellers' story is far more ambitious and mysterious.

Our best guess is that these wise ones, these magi were Persian sages of the ancient Zoroastrian religion -

probably at home in palaces and other fine dwellings-

Like many ancient sages, they studied the night sky.

And they would notice if a new star showed up-

Stars don't usually do that- and they don't usually move around-

Perhaps it was that rarely seen conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which looks like a new star, one not seen before/

This story harkens back to Isaiah 60- which foretold a visitation from afar, via camel, bringing gold and frankincense.

There a multitude of camels was predicted- meaning a multitude of humans- maybe even more than 3 wise men- who knows? Matthew doesn't say.

This travellers story is also one of pilgrimage.

A very strange one though-

Ancient Persia was a fascinating destination, rich in cultural and religious and imperial heritage-

Today Jerusalem is a known pilgrimage destination for 3 great religions.

Back then it was part of a mere colony, once of Persia , now of Rome- and it was special only to Jews, and the magi were not Jewish.

And, surprise of surprise, when the Magi made it through the vast desert to the city of Jerusalem, the star seemed to tell them this was not their final destination,

And Herod told them the same- as he supposedly had heard a rumour of a special baby born to be King of the Jews,
Born to take his job-
And he hoped the Magi would lead him to the baby.

The Magi fetched up in an obscure small town, and in the midst of a political quagmire.
This town, according to Matthew, was actually home for the little family-
No doubt it was a modest home- T.S. Eliot pictures the Magi having to bend low as they entered the doorway, not just out of reverence.

So a pilgrimage-

With a thank-offering we interpret as symbolizing kingship and priesthood and suffering- all part of the story yet to behold.

Though I've learned the gold might have represented turmeric- which is a very healthy spice- perhaps there's a hint of Jesus the healer.

The Other Epiphany travellers' tales: from Bethlehem

But this was a high risk pilgrimage- because who knows who had followed the Magi ?

And the storyteller had a problem - he has to get Jesus and Mary and Joseph out of Bethlehem and into Nazareth -

So , the story goes, the Magi realized what Herod was up to, and they gave him the slip , going home another way.

forever changed in their deep allegiance,

No longer serving the courts of power if they could save a life.

And Joseph was warned of danger in a dream, and the little family sought asylum in Egypt, until it was safe to go home- home by another way, to a different home , to Nazareth.

Like millions since, they were threatened by genocide and unlike many, they escaped.

And those treasures might not have gone with them- refugees often leave with just what they can carry and do not share our attachment to material objects one doesn't strictly need.

A precarious journey- like so many journeys since- journeys slower than theirs to reach a safe destination-

And in our world, many migrants travel dangerously and do not make it.

And in our pandemic times many have set out for safe places and are still waiting until they can travel further,

A traveller's tale gone wrong- or did it?

Travel does not always go as planned- many discovered this last year, when their winter trips had to be cut short -

In our last traveller's tale nothing goes as planned- the ancient legend of Artaban, the fourth wise man - the rich man with not just one but 3 precious gifts, a sapphire, ruby and pearl.

Nothing works out- stuff keeps happening!

A sick man had to be cared for,

Delaying Artaban's trip so he needed to sell the sapphire in order to hire his own camels and supplies.

Then he arrived 3 days after the otherwise ones- and the baby Jesus had fled for refuge, and he bribed the soldiers with his ruby- so another baby would be saved.

And then - there was no GPS, no print media, no TV, no Google - no way to trace someone on a circuitous journey- plus there was a lot of plain bad luck-
He did not catch up to Jesus until Good Friday- and just when he might have tried to save him, he had to sell his pearl to save a young woman from slavery.

Artaban thought his journey had gone all wrong- and that he'd brought nothing to Jesus- and now it was too late- but on his deathbed he receives the good news:

" For as much as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me"

It was a journey of mercy, a journey of compassion-
in the end it wasn't about where he arrived but how he travelled.

Our tales of travelling, or not

Each of these travellers' tales may speak to your physical and spiritual journeys- I'd love to hear how!

I'm guessing though- all of us can relate to Artaban- especially now.

Often, our travel plans change- we delay or cancel or come home quicker than expected-

Often our dreams, our aspirations are put on hold.

Often, we may wonder- what have we accomplished, what have we got to show for our years of living?

What about those waiting times, those interrupted times, those times when stuff happens?

My guess is- like Artaban we've all made choices that didn't seem to get us anywhere but made all the difference to someone else-

And even today, as we don't go anywhere much or see anyone much, we are making choices, choices for well-being, community, compassion,

In our not-doing we may be doing more than we know,

In our not-going we may be going where Spirit beckons,

Following the star, living in the light.

May it be so!

Music for Reflection

A Light Is Gleaming

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN1Vhv2BEtE>

[Linnea Good] a singalong video by Linnea Good, music, lyrics and lovely images.

God's creatures are part of this too!

Stewardship Seconds

Let us share the grace we have received with the world

Offering Prayer

From God's abundance, we receive what we most deeply need. We give what we can, responding to the deep needs in one another and in people around the world. We trust that as we give, so we shall receive. May we grow in thankfulness for the gifts we have received, that we may grow also in generosity, joyfully giving from our abundance today and always.

Prayer for Epiphany and New Year

When the heavens are bright with mystery,
when wondrous starlight breaks through the clouds,
we pause to see, to marvel,
not knowing what will be tomorrow,
to receive what is given for this step of our journey.

When one year passes its final hour, and a new beginning is spread out before us,
we pause, not knowing what this year will be,,
its joys, its gifts, its griefs, its hardships,
but pondering the gift of an empty page,
where the next chapter has not been written.

In this New Year, may we let go of those regrets and failures and disappointments which can cloud
our vision and stop us moving forward.

In this season of Epiphany, of manifestation, of revelation,
of signs and wonders appearing where we least look for them,
may we, like the wanderers and searchers old and new,
see our lives in a new light, our friends and loved ones and co-workers in a new light,

May we glimpse gifts we did not notice before.
May we see new small possibilities and lovingly tend them, watching them grow.
May we like women and men of faith and hope in every age
see visions and dream dreams.

Through our seeing, and responding,
through our willingness to explore new and unknown ways,
may we uncover more and more of the Holy Light
pulsing and present at the heart of all that is.

And may that Light be seen in our courageous living and loving,
in our sparkling words and surprising deeds,
and in our constancy of spirit even amid all that passes,
all that changes.

Sometimes the light is hard to see as the clouds darken,
as our hearts constrict with pain or grief, as troubles come to those we love or this world we love.
In a moment of silence, we recall what troubles us now, for ourselves,
for others, for our community, for our world.

We are always in the embrace of that light which is at the heart even of the clouds and the grief.
In our silence, let us place the troublings of our soul and world in the embrace of this unfailing,
unlimited, unending light.

[pause]

These and all our prayers we gather into the words Jesus taught his friends: Our Father [Creator] etc....

Ministry and Mission, Joys and Concerns

Next week we will have Zoom and Home services. Wise Women study group resumes this Tuesday at 2:30 on Soon and the Wesley Board meets at 7 p.m. by Zoom Wed. Jan. 6. Wesley Annual Reports are due January 10 at the church email address. Scotch Ridge Annual Meeting Tues. Dec.19.

Carol

The First Nowell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kt1m7sPaRuA>

[English traditional, sung by King's College, Cambridge, choir and congregation]

***The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields where they lay,
In fields where they lay a'keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.***

Chorus: *Nowell, nowell ,noweli , noweli,. 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.*** **Chorus:**

***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.*** **Chorus:**

***The star drew night 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.*** **Chorus:**

***Then entered in those wise men three,
Full reverently upon their knee
And offered there in his presence
Their gold and myrrh and frankincense.*** **Chorus:**

***Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord
Who hath made heaven and earth of naught
And with his blood our life hath bought.*** **Chorus:**

Words of Parting and Blessing

And now may the light we have received go with us into the world, as a gift to all who long for light and hope and joy. And as the light lives on within us and among us, may the Source, the Sign and the Spirit of light guide your path now and always.

Music for Going Forth

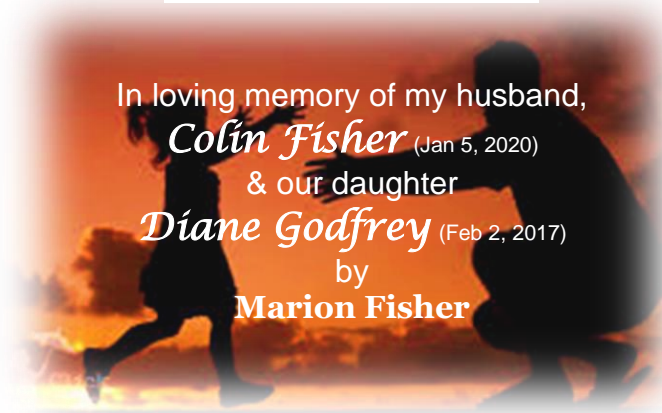
O Thou That Tallest Glad Tidings to Zion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqzO8omYJWg>

enjoy this lovely aria from Messiah, sung by contralto Carolyn Watkinson with the Academy of St Martin's in the Field Orchestra and Westminster Cathedral Choir

Credits: all prayers by Jane

Bulletin Dedication



In loving memory of my husband,

Colin Fisher (Jan 5, 2020)

& our daughter

Diane Godfrey (Feb 2, 2017)

by

Marion Fisher

Attention: Committee Chairs Annual Reports will be due January 10, 2021.
Please email them to wesleyunitedstandrews@gmail.com Thank you!

[In and Around Wesley and St James](https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/events/)

Check for events and any updates/further information on our website;

<https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/events/>

Tuesday 5th January 2:30-4pm Wild Wisdom ZOOM
We will be reading the book, "Coming Back to Life", by Joanne Macy, and reflecting on its themes of enlightened and compassionate environmental activism. Led by Carole Martignacco, the group is a wonderful source of inspiration and support. This is open to all, so please contact Francie (francie.rosie@gmail.com) if you are interested in attending
ZOOM <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3067392185>

Wednesday 6th January 7-9 pm ZOOM Wesley Board Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3067392185>

Thursday 7th January 7-7:30 pm Jane on Facebook Live

Friday 8th January 10 am ZOOM Coffee break with Jane
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3067392185>

Sunday, 10th January 10 am ZOOM Sunday Worship
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3067392185>

Sunday, 10th January Home Worship
A Home Worship service provided as an alternative to In Person Worship provided by email or please see our website for at Home Worship and other virtual gatherings
<https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/>

Please check our calendar on our website for any upcoming events or changes to events
<https://wesleyunitedchurchstandrewsbytheseanb.ca/events/>

When sending Announcements

State if you wish them to go on the Bulletin, the COOP, Facebook page, Website, or all four! (photos can be placed on all but the bulletin)

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Wesley United Church, 77 William St, St Andrews NB E5B1W8
and
St James Pastoral Charge, 731 Route 745, Oak Hill, NB E5A3C7

In case of pastoral emergency, contact Rev. Jane Doull
[call 529-3474](tel:529-3474) [text 467-1494](tel:467-1494) [email jvdoull@gmail.com](mailto:jvdoull@gmail.com)

Any other matters please call Barb Sheen, Chair of the Worship Committee 469-4631.

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