

**January 3, 2021
Epiphany**



“Epiphanies awaken the soul.” - **A.D. Posey**

“Each star is a mirror reflecting the truth inside you.” - **Aberjhani**

“For a star to be born, there is one thing that must happen: a gaseous nebula must collapse. So collapse. Crumble. This is not your destruction. This is your birth.” - **Zoey Skylar**

“We are stars wrapped in skin; the light you are seeking has always been within” - **Rumi**

“There is a light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the light that shines in your heart.” - **Chandogya Upanishad**

“There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.” - **Edith Wharton**

"You are a light. You are THE light. Never let anyone - any person or any force - dampen, dim or diminish your light." - **Congressman John Lewis**

ORDER of WORSHIP

PRELUDE: “Once in Royal David’s City” *Dwayne Johnson, trumpet and Rachel Johnson, piano.*

WELCOME: Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We’re so glad you have joined us this morning for our Epiphany service.

With the rise in cases of COVID, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another especially at this time of year, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Warning for Special Congregational Meeting
Update on Kenya
For further Prayer and Reflection
Star Words

This year for Epiphany, which is January 6th, and which we will be celebrating today, you are invited to receive a Star Word. As the Magi followed the star, so we find light that guides us. As we enter 2021, if you would like me to pull a random Star Word for you, send me an email or comment on the post I will put up on our Facebook page. I will say a word of prayer and then pick a word for you. You don't have to be Christian, religious at all, or even a member of GCC. Feel free to share this with family and friends. What word will help guide you this year? What word will help show you how to shine your heart's light this year? Share with us how this star word is guiding you via email, on [Facebook](#) or on [Instagram](#). [#guidingstar](#) [#bethelight](#)

So, as we begin today, let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet (Wahn tass tee qwet)
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,
let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki
Tribe.
These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.
We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...
It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth.

Of past and present, of pain and reconciliation
Of mystery and majesty...let us begin.

SILENT MEDITATION & THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

CALL TO WORSHIP: Epiphany

The New Dawn will arise upon you.

You shall see and be radiant.

The New Dawn will arise upon you.

The Holy One will bless the people with peace.

The New Dawn will arise upon you.

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

The New Dawn will arise upon you.

All: **God is here among us.**

Let us rejoice and be glad in God's presence.

OPENING HYMN: #161 "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" Words and music by Philipp Nicolai (1597), harmonized by J. S. Bach (1731); *GCC Virtual Choir with Rachel Johnson, piano and Dwayne Johnson, trumpet*

OPENING PRAYER: "The Work of Christmas" by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION FOR EPIPHANY

God of Light,
we confess that we have gone astray and have left Your light.
We follow the dim lights of the world of success and fortune.
We follow the dim lights
that call us to be more religious by following rules.
We follow the fading light of personal salvation.
Forgive us for not seeking the true Light,
of Your love for all the world.
Forgive us for not following the ways of Jesus,
who commanded us to love one another.
Call us to be light-bearers of love, compassion and justice,
in which the Mystery of Your Love is revealed.

In the name of Jesus, the Messiah, we pray. **Amen.**

TIME OF SILENCE

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God's light is present in this world.

Present in the Christ child, born to lead us out of darkness.

Present in the star, in all that guides us to love.

God's light is in the world, and the darkness did not overcome it.

God's grace is in the world, and our mis-steps will not overcome it.

We are loved, we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.

ANTHEM: "Over the Hill and Over the Dale" Words: J. M. Neale and Tony Barrand; Music: Piae Cantiones (1582); *Tony Barrand, with Fred Breunig, violin and Andy Davis, piano*

CHILDREN'S STORY: "Three Wise Women" by Mary Hoffman

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

CHILDREN'S HYMN: #364 "This Little Light of Mine" American Spiritual;
Emma Davis

SCRIPTURE READING: *Margie Serkin*

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

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one

who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

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

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn: #617
“Write These Words in Our Hearts ...”

SERMON: Be a Star!

“Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are.” For many of us since childhood, we have been taught to wonder and look in awe at those “diamonds in the sky”. How many of us have looked skyward in an attempt to seek some guidance? How many of us can remember some astrological event that we witnessed in our lifetime, an eclipse, meteor shower or the rising of the southern cross. One of my most powerful “star” memories was of visiting my mom in CO and camping out in Estes State Park during the height of the Perseids meteor showers. I barely slept all night. Being at that elevation, on a clear night, I spent the night watching meteors streak across the sky, and choosing which stars it seemed I could simply reach up and pluck out of the sky.

Recently, there was another sky event that captured people’s attention - The Great Conjunction or The Christmas Star, as it was being referred to when Jupiter and Saturn came together. Now this happens about every 20 years, but what made this year’s spectacle so rare, then? It’s been nearly 400 years since the planets passed this close to each other in the sky, and nearly 800 years

since the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter occurred at night, allowing nearly everyone around the world to witness this “great conjunction”. Patrick Hartigan, an astronomer at Rice University, says, "You'd have to go all the way back to just before dawn on March 4, 1226, to see a closer alignment between these objects visible in the night sky."

Today we hear the story of another great conjunction - the coming together of an infant king and three sages from faraway lands, who are guided by a star to seek him out.

I invite you to pray with me - **May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in our sight loving and gracious God.**

The feast of the Epiphany is a commemoration of the story of three wise men who come to find Jesus, the newborn king, and pay him homage. It is always celebrated two weeks after Christmas. The joke, of course, is that if they had been three wise women, they would have been there already, because besides following the star, they would have stopped and asked for directions.

But look a little closer: This Gospel reading isn't a story of three kings. It is the story of two - one a tyrannical, power hungry dictator who is so insecure that he is afraid of a newborn baby. His fear drives him to do things to make others afraid too. A tyrannical leader, who would start a war or enact genocide to protect and defend their own ego, instead of the people in their charge. The other king is that newborn baby, born of love both human and divine, come to set the world free of its fear, born in the most unexpected way, born to fulfill their sole purpose to show the world how to love, soon to be a refugee fleeing for their lives from the violence and malice the other king would unleash.

So, a story of two kings and of three wise ones. A story of magic, mystery and science live together in harmony in this story. There is no conflict between them. In fact the story wouldn't have a very good ending without one of them. We are told they are “wise men” not kings - “most likely astrologers from Persia, which is modern-day Iran, and their visit upended the seat of power, put in place by an empire. They were coming to seek a newborn king, a nobody. That's where the hope is. In the nobodies. In us. Not in the empire or the puppets that play homage.”

The story of the Magi goes a little something like this. They were nobility, scientists, astrologers, and also, adventurers. They saw the star “at its rising” (meaning the night Jesus was born it appeared). They travel to find the child somewhere in the Middle East, narrow it down to Herod's territory and go to get their travel visas from him. Herod is a jealous and paranoid ruler, hears about the star, has his advisors read him the prophesy and slyly tells the

Magi to come tell him of where the child is when they are finished so, “he too can pay him homage.” Yeah... right.

If we continue reading past today’s Scripture, Herod’s true motivation for wanting to know where Jesus was is revealed. From Matthew 2:13-15

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod.

Political corruption, mass genocide, and a refugee family. It was then. It is now.

It is this story that we are referring to when we say that Jesus was a refugee. We cannot talk about this story without drawing the connection to what is still happening at our own borders.

Mary and Joseph took Jesus and fled by night, out of fear for their child’s safety, led by moonlight and by the lamp of determination, to find a peaceful place to settle. Sent out from their own home by tragedy and danger, they made a new home among strangers who spoke an unfamiliar language and practiced religions different from their own. Perhaps this experience helped make Jesus the kind of man he grew up to be - one who welcomed the poor, those different from him, and those at the margins, because that’s what he had lived as a child.

I imagine Mary holding her newborn son and I wonder - could she ever have imagined that that he might be murdered by the Empire. It might have happened a lot sooner in his life if it had not been for those three wise ones, who chose to follow their hearts and dreams and not the unjust mandate they were given by a vindictive tyrant, a false King. The Magi’s decision to not return to Herod was an act of civil disobedience. Mary and Joseph choosing to flee was an act of love and protection for their child.

All of this is also part of the Epiphany story. The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word which means ‘reveal’ or to “show forth.” It also can mean an appearance or manifestation, especially of a divine being.

The greatest use of Scripture is for it to be a mirror for us, to “show forth” for us who we are called to be. Here are some epiphanies that were revealed to me as I re-read this Gospel story.

When the wise men left the manger, having had an epiphany of their own - a dream revealing Herod’s true motivation - they returned to their country by a different road. The birth of Jesus had changed everything and they needed to find a new way. We need to find a new way. How might we choose a different

road - a different way to respond? If we are wise, we will follow the Magi's example for the sake of incarnating Jesus in this world, for the sake of the children. Once you really see the star and decide to follow it, your life will never be the same. The journey will be hard and what you find will not be the end of the journey. No, it will only be the beginning.

We don't know the real timeline on when the three wisdom seekers arrived. Perhaps they arrived when Jesus was still an infant, or perhaps much later than that. Whether the Magi come a few days after the birth of Jesus or when he was a toddler or pre-schooler, the Magi are unique because they come after the fact. As someone who often feels like they always arrived a little "late to the game", this gives me comfort. Perhaps it's not too late to have an epiphany. Perhaps the window for learning and brilliant inspiration is not so tight as we would make it out to be.

Here's another personal epiphany - It is those who are outsiders, strangers from "strange lands" who show us what to do, how to fight the powers of oppression and violence. I think about the power of that truth in today's world.

Perhaps our journey toward the light is long, and perhaps we don't really know where we're going, but if we turn toward the light, if we keep our sights fixed on the star, we will find what our hearts most desire.

Dr. Serene Jones, President of Union Theological Seminary, has this to say about this Gospel story. "Civil disobedience lies at the heart of the Epiphany story: the Magi receive an unjust order from a vindictive tyrant. Instead, they defy him. May we do likewise."

Epiphany, meaning "showing forth", showing forth in the revelation that Jesus is God incarnate. Showing forth, us showing forth God's love in the world. So, in this new year, be someone else's epiphany.

Our Jewish siblings just recently celebrated Hannukah, a celebration of lights during which they light the menorah. There is a special ninth candle in the menorah called the 'shammash', or servant candle, which is used to light the other candles - one light helping the others show forth their own light.

So - be the shammash! Be a star and shine your light! Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER: "To See A Star" by Eric Fairbrother

On any night, when
in passing, as we often do -
a moment
of looking up can happen
a simple act
of careless
choosing
to see

beyond ourselves
or see a star

And if not, as can
happen on a clouded night
when stars are
hidden
to see a star
becomes a glancing
possibility or
perhaps
a choosing and
for some
a hope

ANTHEM: “Star in the East” 19th century American hymn from The Baptist Harmony; *GCC Virtual Choir*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: *Sarah and Bart Rankin*
by Rev. Eric Ledermann, University Presbyterian Church

God of wonder and mystery,
God of the stars and the universe,
God of winding ways and straight paths,
we gather today with gratitude for the gift of your constant presence,
your trustworthy guidance,
and your daring risk-taking with us.
You dare to love us despite our inability to respond fully.
You dare to care for us, despite our challenge in caring for others.
You dare to walk with us, despite our fickleness.

On our own journeys toward the stars and guiding points you put before us,
you continue to lead us forward,
guiding us by the teachings of Jesus
to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly in your loving shadow.
As we struggle with the political wrangling of this world,
the wars waged for both justice and greed,
the violence committed daily against the innocent,
let alone the pain of broken relationships and loss,
you remain steadfast in your care and devotion
for your entire creation throughout the universe.
It is almost too much to take in sometimes.
And even in our doubts and disbelief,
our struggle to understand and constant misunderstanding,
and our flat-out ignorance about your ways,
you remain constantly present to us.

We pray for peace in this world, Lord,
the kind of peace in which we celebrate diversity,
are joyfully challenged by adversity,
and share in the joy that is to be found everywhere.

We pray for those who are lonely,
that you might lead us to find ways to reach out and be friends.
We pray for those who are hungry,
that you might lead us to offer sustenance.
We pray for those who are lost,
that you might lead us to give hope and direction.
We pray for all those who are grieving the loss of a family member, relative,
friend or animal companion. We pray for all the precious souls lost to COVID –
each one someone's heart.
We pray for all those who are struggling with illnesses - chronic illness, mental
illness or addiction.
We pray for all those who are sick from COVID, those healing at home or who
are fighting for their lives in hospitals around the country and the world.

We pray for the countries of the world,
that we might find a way to work together to lift one another up.
We pray for our leaders in Washington,
that your Spirit might guide them set an example for our country and the world
to work together rather than against one another.
We pray for our denomination,
that we may seek to build up this body
and seek to repair the theological divisions that are tearing us apart.
We pray for the frontline workers most especially healthcare workers who have
risked their very lives to help heal us and keep us safe. May we truly honor
them and their sacrifices by wearing our masks, practicing distancing and
washing our hands.

And we pray for ourselves,
that we might continue on this journey,
learning the lessons you offer,
seeking the fullness of your perfection,
and live as you would have us live.

These prayers and hopes we offer in confidence and gratitude of your love and
presence...

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us using whatever words
help us to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the
(kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all
are whole, where all know love, where *all* are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) 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 trespasses against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the power and the glory now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #278

“Hear our Prayer, Oh Lord...”

THE OFFERTORY

CALL TO OFFERING: The Love of God is born new in the world as often as we embody that love in the works of compassion, peace and justice. Let us offer our gifts in a spirit of generosity and hope.

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail 38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301 or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church's website and clicking the PayPal donation button on the home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of our time and talents and dedicate them to continuing the work of showing more love in the world.

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Loving God,
We offer you our gold:
The shining moments that brighten our lives.

We offer you our frankincense:
The blessing of bread and our heart's yearning in prayer.
We offer you our myrrh:
The shadows through which we stumble.

Transform our inadequate gifts,
that they may be an acceptable sacrifice of praise,
and transform our lives
to reflect more deeply your justice and joy
In the life of the world.

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION by Maren Tirabassi

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

This is Holy Communion for a Journey Sunday. It is the Second Sunday after Christmas, the Sunday three days after New Year, and three days before

Epiphany, and, in the old song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas” it is the ninth day - the day when the “gift” is nine people dancing.

So come to this table of ... one star for following,
bread and cup for sharing,
three days of New Year
at least four still-traveling camels,
and many, many hopes for the world.

Come to this table, even if you want
to be *laying* everything down
because you are so weary of being fearful,
isolated or essential to everyone but you.
Come to this table if you are *swimming*
in Zoom, virtual education,
financial risk, or grief.
Come to this table if you *milked*
all the joy from Christmas –
enough to carry you into 2021 ...
or not nearly enough.
Come to this table,
if you have stopped *dancing*,
even though
you are carrying many gifts,
or you need to be healed
by watching for the *dance*
in snowflakes
in friend or stranger, in the old story
of another path home, and the warm bread and sweet cup
shared right now.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE

We remember in this New Year
with the fearfulness of the pandemic
and hope that it will be ended —
not only the journey of the magi
guided by a star,
but all the oases where they rested
and the people they met,
who lived in those places,
and shared their food.

We remember a Child born to change everything
and the endangerment of many children,
and we remember that the baby
named Jesus,

grew up to help people
in their hurting and loss,
traveled as many roads as we do,
and taught us with simple words
we can understand,
and stories we come to many times
to find new meaning.

At Passover he blessed unleavened bread.
and poured wine and love freely.

At Emmaus, he prayed and broke the bread,
but sent us to find the cup in the world.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Emmanuel, God you are with us,
in our lonely nights,
following so-distant stars
We are carrying our old years
and opening our new ones,
always hoping,
for an oasis for each of us
and a blessing on earth,
in the form of bread in our hands,
and the cup we lift.

May this bread and cup be so sacred
we never lose the Star's shine,
ignore a New Year embedded in every day,
or forget the Christ of the Dance,
and the invitation to joy.

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

Leader: Let us share the bread.

People: It is the gift that reminds us of our gifts.

Leader: Let us drink deeply.

People: So that we may always travel on.

COMMUNION HYMN: #159 "Love Came Down at Christmas" Words: Christina G. Rosetti (1885); Music: Maurice C. Whitney (1962); *Perrin Scott, with Andy Davis, piano*

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

based on Howard Thurman's "The Work of Christmas"

God, we thank you that when the star in the sky is gone, the kings and princes are home, the shepherds are back with their flocks, and we are tempted to pack the story away, this very Bread and Cup gives us the hope and courage to begin the true work of Christmas. Help us to find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry, release the prisoner, rebuild the nations, bring peace among all, and make a heart-music so that everyone can dance. Amen

CLOSING HYMN: #167 “Arise, Your Light Is Come!” Words: Ruth Duck (1973); Music: William H. Walter (1894); *GCC Virtual Choir, Andy Davis, piano.*

BENEDICTION

Go in peace; love and care for one another in the name of Christ;
and may the Spirit of God
fill your hearts, souls and minds;
may the power of God which upheld them,
strengthen you for each day;
and may the love of God which directed their every action
be your guiding light and your shining star,
both now and forevermore. Amen

THREEFOLD AMEN: Hymn #291

POSTLUDE: “Wonder of Wonders, Here Revealed” Music by Henry W. Baker;
Patty Meyer, organ

For further reflection and prayer:

[Choose Something Like a Star](#) - a choral piece by Randall Thompson based on the poem by Robert Frost

[India Arie Performing I Am Light 60th GRAMMYS](#)

[Sending You Light – by Melanie Demore performed with Julie Wolf](#)

[How To Let Your Light Shine Bright – a motivational speech/sermon by Lisa Nichols](#)

Movie for the kids and the young at heart

[The Star](#)

Bo the donkey and his new friends follow the Star and become accidental heroes in the greatest story ever told -- the first Christmas.

Activity:Instructions for Blessing the Home

The chalking of the doors is a centuries-old practice throughout the world, though it appears to be somewhat less well-known in the United States.

“Chalking the door” is a way to celebrate and physically mark the occasion of the Epiphany and God’s blessing of our lives and home.

A traditional way of doing this is to use chalk blessed during the liturgy for the Feast of Epiphany and write above the home's entryway, 20 + C + M + B + 21. The letters C, M, B have two meanings. They are the initials of the traditional names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. They also abbreviate the Latin words *Christus mansionem benedicat*, "May Christ bless the house." The "+" signs represent the cross and 2021 is the year. With time the chalk will fade. As it does, we let the meaning of the written symbols sink into the depths of our hearts and be manifest in our words and actions.

Using the blessed chalk mark the lintel of your front door (or front porch step) as follows: 20 + C + M + B + 21 *saying:*

The three Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar followed the star of God's Son who became human two thousand and nineteen years ago. May Christ bless our home and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.

Then say the following prayer:

Visit, O blessed Lord, this home with the gladness of your presence. Bless all who live or visit here with the gift of your love; and grant that we may manifest your love to each other and to all whose lives we touch. May we grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of you; guide, comfort, and strengthen us in peace, O Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.