



New Year/Epiphany Worship
Seward United Methodist Church
January 1, 2023

Gathering Music/Prelude

Megan Forbes

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

L: Calling all seekers, all dreamers, all believers...

Calling all glass-half-full optimists and lighthouse keepers... Calling all star-chasers and bedtime prayer speakers...

Bring your questions, your hope, your faith and your fear into this space.

P: **God is here.**

Hymn

We Three Kings

UMH 254

1 We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of light,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light.

4 Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb. [Refrain]

2 Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never,
over us all to reign. [Refrain]

3 Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, voices raising,
worshiping God on high. [Refrain]

5 Glorious now behold him arise;
King and God and sacrifice:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies. [Refrain]

Call to Confession

Leader: One of my favorite things about the Magi is that they go looking for God.
Actively and consistently, day by day, they follow the star until it guides them to Jesus.

I wish I was more like that, but I admit, I tend to follow God with part of my heart. I tend to get distracted and lost, taking exit ramps off the road, following whatever new shiny sign is present. It's part of being human.

In the prayer of confession, we acknowledge that more often than we'd like to admit, we find ourselves following the wrong star. Fortunately for us, God is the map maker, and God's map is measured in grace, so we have nothing to fear. Let us pray together. Let us seek God together. Join me in the prayer of confession:

Prayer of Confession

**ALL: God of starlight,
we know that faith isn't a vending machine. Good news can't be bought or
manufactured. It does not arrive with a push of a button.**

**Instead, in this noisy world, we have to look for you in our midst. We have to walk
toward you, just as the Magi did.
We have to believe that love really can change the world. We have to seek the stars
beyond the city lights.**

**Forgive us for forgetting that.
Forgive us for seeking you with only part of our hearts.
We long to be more like the Magi; may we walk your way every single day. Amen.**

Words of Forgiveness

Leader: Friends, I have nothing but good news.

Since the very first day, God has taken the pieces of our hearts that we have offered up and has said, "I can work with that."

Even in our failings, God has washed us with words of grace, belonging, and love.

No matter what star you've followed, no matter how far you've walked,
no matter how lost you got—
you belong to God.

God loves you. God forgives you. God claims you. End of story. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Blessing of the Calendars

Children's Time

Pastor Jo Ellen Axthelm

Scripture Lesson Matthew 2:1-15

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 in the east 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 in the east, 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.

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 got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt¹⁵ 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.”

Hymn

Always Seeking

Text: Anna Strickland (2022), Music: Henry Thomas Smart (1866)

1 As the wise men scanned the heavens
There they saw Christ’s natal star
Then began the long procession
Seeking him in country far

2 When they reached King Herod’s palace
Asking where to find the child
Herod schemed in all his malice
This new king himself to find (R)

Refrain:

Always seeking, moving onward
Following where God may lead

3 Fleeing from the wrath of Herod
Joseph led his family
Seeking in the seat arid
Safety there as refugees (R)

4 Seeking signs or seeking power
Seeking safety, seeking home
Day by day and hour by hour
We press on toward the unknown (R)

Sermon “From Generation to Generation: We Keep Seeking” Rev. Dr. Mary Kay Totty

Response to the Sermon/Affirmation of Faith (in unison)

**We believe that faith is active, found on long walks,
and in long talks,
in future days,
and down memory lane.
We believe that those who seek
will find, although it may not be what they expected.
We believe that God finds us first.
We believe that God drops breadcrumbs along our way
in the shape of people,
invitations,
and even starlight.
We believe that being a seeker—
of God, of justice, of community—
is a holy thing.
So we strive to live with an open spirit,
with soft hearts,
and with room to grow.
May it be so.
This we believe.
Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Prayer Hymn

The First Noel

UMH 245

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

2 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. [Refrain]

Refrain:

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

3 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. [Refrain]

Sharing Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer/Lord's Prayer

Offering

Offertory
Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

God of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow having blessed us with time, talent, and treasure, we in turn are to bless others in our stewardship of all you entrust to us. Receive the financial offerings we make and put them to good use. Amen.

“Explanation of Star Words”

Celebration of Holy Communion

Celebrant Pastors: Mary Kay Totty and JoEllen Axthelm

For Holy Communion, if at home, you may use whatever simple elements you have at hand — bread, crackers, pita, juice, water, wine. If you are at the in person worship please follow the instructions given by the Pastor. The sacrament of communion is open to all persons. Our communion bread is gluten free.

Invitation to the Table:

Leader:

Friends, we know what it feels like to look for God.

We know what it feels like to turn our heads up to the sky, looking for stars or signs. We know what it feels like to walk day after day, hoping that we grow closer to God. We know what it feels like to seek.

I think that's part of why we end up here,
because we are hoping that in the midst of this messy world we might catch a glimpse of God
that will carry us through.

Well, friends, I have good news.
God is already here.

Like a mighty wind, God is moving through this room.
God is at this Table, inviting us forward.
The invitation may not be as clear as a star in the sky,
but from generation to generation, God has always gathered with God's people.

So come to this Table with your questions and your doubts. Come with your joys and your gratitude.
Come seeking, come hungry, come curious.
Come open. Come not because you have to, but because you can. Come with all of you, for there is
room for you here.

This is God's Table; this is God's meal. We are the guests.
So come.

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

God of today, tomorrow, and yesterday,
like the Magi, we are seeking you.
Like the Magi, we are bringing ourselves closer to you, step by step, and word by word.

So today we ask that you would make yourself known to us.
Reach into our spirits and give us a boost of confidence that love is real and we are not alone.

We know we're asking a lot for a group that brings very little. We don't have gold or frankincense or myrrh. We haven't spent the last several days traveling here by camel. We're no Magi, but we're yours.

Instead, we bring ourselves to this Table—to your Table—in hopes of catching a glimpse of you. Speak to us in this bread. Speak to us in the cup. Speak to us through these star words. Let them be invitations and challenges for the year ahead; let them be like stars above helping us look for you.

Holy God, you were the God of yesterday, and we know you'll be the God of tomorrow, for you have loved us from generation to generation.

As you are with us this morning, be present in these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the Bread of Life and the Cup of Grace. Fill us with sure and certain knowledge of your saving grace that we might share your grace with all we encounter. Make us one with you and one with each other in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes again and we feast at your heavenly banquet. Amen and amen.

Sharing of the Bread and Cup/Selecting a "Star Word"

Hymn

Once in Royal David's City

UMH 250

1. Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed;
Mary, loving mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little child.

2. He came down to earth from heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and his shelter was a stable,
and his cradle was a stall.
With the poor, the scorned, the lowly
lived on earth our Savior holy.

3. Jesus is our childhood's pattern;
day by day, like us he grew;
he was little, weak, and helpless,
tears and smiles like us he knew;
and he feeleth for our sadness,
and he shareth in our gladness.

4. And our eyes at last shall see him,
through his own redeeming love;
for that child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heaven above;
and he leads his children on
to the place where he is gone.

Benediction

Passing of the Peace

Postlude

Megan Forbes