



10AM

January 2, 2022

First Parish of Westwood, UCC

Growing Faith, Sharing Love, Grounding Lives

Epiphany

We Are an Open & Affirming Church

First Parish of Westwood affirms the dignity and worth of every person regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, physical or mental ability, family structure, education level, economic circumstance and faith or religious tradition.

WELCOME AND NAMING OUR GRATITUDE

CENTERING OUR FOCUS UPON GOD Break Forth, O Beauteous Light J. Schop/ J. S. Bach

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come to this place—each of us on our own path. The path is winding, and the path is not always clear, and the path changes, but we are here. God is walking us home. What a gift it is to not walk alone. Let us worship Holy God.

OPENING HYMN W&R NO. 233 We Three Kings of Orient Are

We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star. O.....star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to they perfect light.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S PRESENCE

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON

I imagine that, for the Magi, walking to Bethlehem was not easy. I imagine that following a star for navigation was definitely not easy. However, I imagine that the hardest part might have been not knowing where the road would lead. Friends, we are not always the best versions of ourselves when we are faced with uncertainty or changing plans. Facing the unknown pulls on every ounce of our anxiety and fear. It rings all our stress alarms and can erode our patience, our calm, our sense of perspective. Fortunately for us, we worship a God who is gracious beyond imagination and meets us on every twist and turn of the road home. So let us pray together now, knowing that even in our worst moments, we are held by God.

God of changed plans, The Magi heard in a dream that they were to take a new way home—a different path, an untraveled road. And to our amazement, they did just that. The Magi packed their bags and went home by another way. We wish that change could be easy for us, but more often than not, when whispers of change come, we tend to clench our fists and hold on tighter. Forgive us for resisting change that might be holy. Forgive us for ignoring that there is more than one road home. Forgive us for failing to hear your invitation. Guide our steps to unfamiliar places.

(silence)

No matter which roads we take in this one wild and precious life, God walks with us. God never leaves our side. When the road changes and we find ourselves on a new path home, God is always there. So hear and believe this good news: No matter where we go, no matter what we do, we are claimed, loved, and held by God. Thanks be to God for a love like that.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

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.

SERMON

Home by Another Way

HYMN NO. 159

As With Gladness Those of Old

As with gladness those of old did the guiding star behold; As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright; So, true Morning Star, may we evermore your splendor see.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastoral Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

We gather together, conscious that raising our hearts and minds is a gift of the Spirit of Life at work in the depths of our being. For the presence of that Spirit in us, we give thanks. We gather together conscious that our celebration gives the Spirit a way of breaking into word and song unique in all the universe. For the words and songs within each of us, we give thanks. And so we offer our thanks and praise inviting the Spirit of Life, Love and Goodness to move freely in our words and actions. Holy, holy, holy, celebrating God, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God. Hosanna in the highest.

Jesus is the story we gather around and give thanks for. Human like us, he discerned where this Spirit of Life is found: in the everyday, in human interaction, in caring, in sharing, in being neighbor. He urged people to work together to establish the 'reign of God by wholehearted generosity, by eliminating boundaries between people, by trust in the goodness of people, and by working for peace and justice in all human endeavors. We remember his total commitment to living fully and loving totally and his faith in a God to be trusted whatever twists life could take in this imperfect world.

BLESSING OF THE BREAD AND CUP

We also remember the tradition... On the night before he died Jesus again shared a meal with his friends. Through grain and grape, bread and wine, and in fellowship together, Jesus spoke of his enduring love for each of them. Jesus took the bread and broke it, saying, "It is my body, broken for you. Go on doing this to recall my presence with you." You shall eat bread and you shall praise the Lord your God. He took the cup, saying, "This means the new relationship established by the shedding of my blood. Go on doing this, whenever you drink it, to recall my presence with you." So he lets his glory be seen among us, and we believe and share his undying life.

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

May the life and the teachings of Jesus motivate all that we do, so that what we profess to have seen in his life and heard in his teaching might be evident in our living and loving. Amen.

VENTURING OUT INTO THE WORLD

*RECESSIONAL HYMN NO. 160 Jesus, The Light of the World

Hark! the herald angels sing, Jesus, the light of the world; Glory to the Christ child bring, Jesus the light of the world. We will follow the light, beautiful light, come where the dewdrops of mercy are bright, Shine all around us by day and by night, Jesus, the light of the world.

*ANNOUNCEMENTS

*BENEDICTION

*FOLLOWING THE LIGHT INTO THE WORLD Go in Peace Kenneth E. White

***Go in peace, and the peace of God be with you this day.
Go in peace, and the peace of God be with you always.
Celebrate and share the joy! Celebrate new life!
Go in peace, and the peace of God be with you always.***

*POSTLUDE Rise Up Shepherd, and Follow Traditional Spiritual

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