**Epiphany of our lord- January 3, 2021**

**zion evangelical lutheran church, philipsburg**

Welcome to everyone on this Epiphany Sunday where we continue to gather in love for one another from the safety of our homes. Happy New Year! The holiday season has certainly been different this year, but I hope everyone still had a wonderful Christmas and New Year’s. ours was quiet and restful. May we continue to stay healthy and safe so that we can once again gather in the future.

I ask that you keep Gwen Kalbfleisch and her family in your prayers as they mourn the death of her brother-in-law Bev Kalbfleisch. Bev died on December 22 at Stratford General Hospital. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May Bev rest in peace. Amen.

Council met this past week, look for a report in the Messenger which will be out sometime in the next week or so.

Thank you so much for your monetary support and prayers in 2020. Zion ended the year on a positive note for which we are grateful.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Arise, shine for your light has come. Behold the glory of the Lord, Alleluia

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*Angels, from the Realms of Glory* (ELW 275)**

1 Angels, from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
once you sang creation's story,  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.  
2 Shepherds, in the fields abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing,  
yonder shines the infant light.  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.  
  
3 Sages, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great desire of nations,  
you have seen his natal star.  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.  
  
4 All creation, join in praising  
God, the Father, Spirit, Son,  
evermore your voices raising  
to the eternal Three in One.  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 60:1-6**

A reading from Isaiah.

1Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.3Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4Lift 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.5Then 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. 6A 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.

**PSALM: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

1Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king’s son;  
 2that he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice;  
 3that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the hills, in righteousness.  
 4Let him defend the needy among the people, rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.   
 5May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another.  
 6Let him come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.  
 7In his time may the righteous flourish; and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.  
 10May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.   
 11May all kings bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.  
 12For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress, the oppressed, and those who have no helper.  
 13He has compassion on the lowly and poor and preserves the lives of the needy.  
 14From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, and precious is their blood in his sight.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 2:1-12**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

1In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2asking, “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.” 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They 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.’ ”  
  7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then 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.” 9When 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. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On 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. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The gospel of our Lord.

**SERMON**

         I am sure most of you were aware of the “Bethlehem Star” that appeared in our skies a couple of weeks ago. It was not actually a star, but two planets, Jupiter and Saturn, aligned so close to one another that it appeared to the naked eye as a bright new star. Now, Jupiter and Saturn align with each other once every 20 years or so, but this was the first time in 800 years that they had aligned so closely. Sadly, it was too cloudy for us to witness the star in our area, but pictures on social media from around the world show a bright and gleaming star full of hope and beauty! After the year we just had, I think many of us wanted to see the star for ourselves. We were looking for some kind of hope and promise for the future, just like the magi in our gospel reading this morning. Daryl Janzen wrote in an article on astrology.com that some modern day astrologers believe that the star that the magi followed was actually 3 planets aligned closely to one another(Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), to create the appearance of an extra bright supernova that slowly faded over the next year.[[1]](#footnote-1) Whatever the star may have been, it led the magi to that hope and promise, that hope and promise that we cling to today.

 Today we celebrate Epiphany. Our gospel reading from Matthew tells the story of how God revealed Godself to the world (especially to the Gentiles or non-Jewish populations). The magi were said to be Gentiles who travelled from Persia (now known as Iran and Iraq). They were scholarly, being well versed in the sciences, astrology, agriculture and even witchcraft to name a few. They would not have been biblical scholars per se, however, it is believed that they were familiar with Scripture, they would have known of the prophecy and expectation of the coming of a king. Micah chapter 5 verses 2-5 tells of the prophetic announcement of salvation in the arrival of a Messiah who would bring peace, justice, and strength to a world in need stating,

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. **3**Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. **4**And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now, he shall be great to the ends of the earth;**5**and he shall be the one of peace.

   The magi upon hearing the news, travelled to Jerusalem using the star to lead the way, where they met Herod. Now Herod was tyrannical and power-hungry. He believed that he was the only king, so when he heard that there was a child born who would be king of the Jews, he became jealous and enraged. These magi appeared wanting to pay homage to a baby, but in his mind, they should have been paying homage to him! He was the rightful leader; he was the king! Herod schemes and tells the magi to go to Bethlehem and report back to him, hoping that they would lead him to this so-called king. The magi continue their journey following the star that had reappeared. Finally, the star stopped at Bethlehem and the magi were greeted by Mary and Jesus and immediately their lives were changed. They knelt down in joy to pay homage to the Messiah, to the rightful king who would change the world with his grace and unconditional love. Like the shepherds in our gospel reading from Luke on Christmas Eve, the magi were transformed by the love and revelation of God through the birth of a tiny baby who was the true light of the world. Before leaving they offered their gifts in thanks and praise to God. God then revealed Godself again in a dream to the magi, telling them to take a different path home to save them from Herod’s wrath. Once they met the true King, their path or journey in life changed offering them hope for a new future where nothing was impossible with God. Jesus came for all, for you, for me, for the world!

Over the past year, we at Zion have been on a journey of our own. I preached my very first sermon to you as your newly called pastor one year ago, the dawn of a new year and a new decade. My sermon that day spoke of the birth of Jesus being the light in the darkness of our world bringing hope and promise to our lives. I closed my sermon that Sunday offering these questions for reflection. *I ask that each of you take some time to see how God has called you to be light in the past and how God is calling you and us to be light in the future. How is God calling us, the people of Zion Lutheran Church in Philipsburg, Ontario to be light in our homes, in our communities, and in the world around us?*

 At that time, we had no idea that a pandemic would create havoc in our lives less than three months later. We had no idea that we would go into lockdown and that the doors of our beloved church would close for almost a year. At times there has been doubt, darkness, and a fear of the unknown. We, like the magi, needed to take a different path to journey forward.

 And I believe we did! As a congregation, we journeyed onward in 2020, steadfast in our faith and love for one another. Relationships were formed and we grew in love for our neighbours. God’s love was revealed when we reached out to one another with phone calls. Warmth and care were provided in sending out blankets from Project R.E.D. We collected clothing, bedding, mugs, containers and money for community agencies who have worked so diligently to care for others during this pandemic. We continued with our weekly worship services going online that have reached folks all over the world, giving hope within the hopelessness that many have felt over the past year. The light of Christ is alive and well in us as it was in the magi! God revealed Godself to the world by having the magi follow a star and take the risk to travel to a distant place to see for themselves the prophecy of love, peace, and justice. God revealed Godself in a dream to the magi having them take a new path. Over this past year, God has revealed Godself and transformed us into something new, and I believe that in 2021 God will continue to work in our lives, God will continue to work through us revealing God’s love for all, just like the love revealed in that tiny babe so many years ago. May we continue to offer the gifts we have to a world in need of the grace, love, and mercy of God. Let it be so! Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY As with Gladness Men of Old (ELW 302)**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNrlpDQ**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB8rKNrlpDQ)

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

Glorious God, fill your church with joy. Let your faithful people live as beacons of your redemption. Give wisdom and courage to your church that it may speak with boldness and confidence, even when words of mercy are met with scorn. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You show us your faithfulness in the rising and setting of the sun. Place wonder into the hearts of those who search the skies and explore the heavens. Curb waste and pollution, that all might have clean air to breathe. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Bring all nations and rulers to the splendor of your dawn. Raise up advocates who champion the cause of exploited and vulnerable people. Inspire leaders to be generous with abundance, that all people might live in stability and freedom. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Come quickly with your healing power to all who seek love, support, and restoration. Dispel fears and shadows. Restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. Bring relief to those who are sick or struggling with illness or injury. We remember Eddy, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Joe, Greg, Tyler, Mary Ann, Gwen Kalbfleisch, and the family of Bev Kalbfleisch, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Bring healing and strength to all Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes as they continue to fight Covid-19. We especially remember Nithview, Carresant Care in Listowel and the PeopleCare in Tavistock where outbreaks are occurring. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Send traveling mercies upon all who journey home by other roads. Guard refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Protect families fleeing conflict in their homelands or abuse in their homes. Tend to those who have no place to lay their heads. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

According to the boundless riches of Christ, you draw all your saints, from the least to the greatest, to your heavenly places. We remember Ruby Doering. As you created all things, make all things new again in the splendor of your glory. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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 and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

Almighty God, who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary, proclaimed joy through the angels, sent the shepherds with good news, and led the magi by a star, bless you this day+ through the Word made flesh. **Amen**

**DISMISSAL**

Glory to God in the highest! **Peace to God’s people on earth!**

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus. **Thanks be to God**

**SENDING SONG*Brightest and Best of the Stars* (ELW 303)**

1 Brightest and best of the stars of the morning,  
dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid.  
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,  
guide where our infant redeemer is laid.  
  
2 Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining;  
low lies his head with the beasts of the stall;  
angels adore him in slumber reclining,  
maker and monarch and savior of all.  
  
3 What shall we give him, in costly devotion?  
Shall we bring incense and off'rings divine,  
gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,  
myrrh from the forest or gold from the mine?  
  
4 Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
vainly with gifts would his favor secure;  
richer by far is the heart's adoration,  
dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.  
  
5 Brightest and best of the stars of the morning,  
dawn on our darkness and lend us your aid.  
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,  
guide where our infant redeemer is laid.

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1. Daryl Janzen, “The ‘Christmas Star’ Appears Again: Jupiter and Saturn Align in the ‘Great Conjunction’ on Dec. 21, 2020” in *The Conversation*, published: Monday, December 21, 2020, accessed December 31, 2020, <https://astronomy.com/news/2020/12/the-christmas-star-appears-again-jupiter-and-saturn-align-in-the-great-conjunction-on-dec-21-2020>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)