

January 5, 2025, EPIPHANY SUNDAY
Pastor Tom Olson, Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Ruth Antal (Osthus.Reynolds)

CALL TO WORSHIP: from Psalm 72

PASTOR: Endow the king with your justice, O God,

ALL: The royal son with your righteousness.

PASTOR: He will judge your people in righteousness,

ALL: Your afflicted ones with justice.

PASTOR: He will endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.

ALL: In his days the righteous will flourish;
prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

HYMN #233 “Tell Me the Old, Old Story”

CONFESSION OF SIN: Psalm 51:1-7 Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

CHILDREN’S SERMON:

Reader: Dave Fischer

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Isaiah 60:1-6 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4*

"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. 5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

SECOND LESSON: *Ephesians 3:1-13 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles- 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.*

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down

from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen)
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

PRAISE SONGS PICKED BY RUTH

SERMON TITLE: “NEW YEAR LESSONS FROM THE MAGI” Matthew 2:1-12; Pastor Tom Olson; January 5, 2025
Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

PLANS: It is time to make plans for 2025. Our church budget. Vacation dates. Wedding plans. Teen-agers making career and education plans. We are working on our estate plans! One thing we all have in common is **NEED FOR SOLID PRINCIPLES** to guide us in the important decisions of life.

EPIPHANY: Today we focus on Epiphany, the Wise Men from the East coming to Bethlehem. They demonstrate several key principles that help us make decisions we won't regret in 2024. God put them in the Bible. They teach us wisdom. **NEW YEAR**

LESSONS FROM THE MAGI, Matthew 2:1-12. The first lesson is...

I. COURAGE: STEP OUT, EVEN IF YOU ARE ALONE

Matthew 2:1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east CAME to Jerusalem

BABYLON: Many Bible scholars feel that these Magi were from Babylon or Persia. They may have been schooled the line of eastern wise men going back to Daniel. It would make sense that they knew about the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures concerning the coming Messiah. They were experts in observing the heavens and would be alert to any stars, constellations and planets that would possibly be a sign God programmed into creation of the coming of the birth of that Messiah. The Magi remind me of some Scriptures:

Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Luke 2:25-27 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts...

SEEKERS: These examples and many more are why we have the old saying, “Wise men still seek Him!”

STAR: They saw the Messiah's star. ***Matthew 2:2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."***

STEP: These Wise Men stepped out in faith when they saw the star. They had to pack provisions, they probably endured ridicule. Nothing could stop them. They had COURAGE. They trusted the prophecies and the star. They knew what their hearts were telling them to do. They stepped out. WHEN GOD IS LEADING US, WE HAVE TO STEP OUT. If you think about it too much, you won't do it. Very few people regret what they DID DO. But many of us regret what we DIDN'T DO Mark Twain has something to say about it. He is quoted as saying this:

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do.”
Attributed to Mark Twain

OSCAR: In the late 1920's Oscar Brown stepped out and came to America to find work so he could send money home to his starving parents and 9 siblings in Norway. He ended up in Bayport, Minnesota and worked at the scorching hot Anderson window foundry making window weights. He then stepped out and enrolled in the Lutheran Bible Institute in spite of his lack of English language skills. Then in the great depression he stepped out and worked his way across America, up the Alaskan coastline, all the way to the farthest point he could go to Little Diomed Island to share the gospel with the Inuit people. He worked in the Nome gold mines 90 feet under the earth to support himself financially. He learned their spoken language and gave them a written language. He planted churches in other villages. He asked a girl to marry him that he didn't even know because he was desperate to have a wife to assist him in his rugged mission work at the end of the earth.

ADVICE: I remember him giving me advice as I started my ministry as his assistant at a rescue mission in Cordova, Alaska IN 1983. He said, “Don't ask people permission to do things because they tend to say ‘No.’ Instead, JUST START and when they come and ask you what you are doing and what permission you have, just tell them what you are doing and then ask them this: ‘Are you

going to help me or not?’ They will either pitch in and help or they will leave you alone because they don't want to help.” In other words, let the Lord lead you and then step out by faith.

THEME: Pastor Richard Anderson had the theme for a year at our country church in Wisconsin: “Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do!” The Magi stepped out. They believed God would take them to the King of the Jews...and He did.

COURAGE: So HAVE COURAGE AND STEP OUT as the Lord leads...even if no one joins you. The song from India says, “*I have decided to follow Jesus...though none go with me, still I will follow...the world behind me the cross before me...no turning back, no turning back.*” THE SECOND NEW YEAR'S LESSON from the Wise Men is...

II. WISDOM: GET DIRECTION FROM THE WORD OF GOD, EVEN IF NO ONE ELSE DOES

Matthew 2:3-8 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 Christ was to be born.

(Now notice where the scholars go to answer the question.)

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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

(Here is where the King starts His paranoid agenda to destroy any threat to his power.)

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 make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

DISAPPEARED: The star brought them to Bethlehem but it disappeared for a while. They got to Jerusalem and needed more guidance. They asked around for help and finally some Bible scholars came forward and told them that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. **GOD'S WORD GAVE THEM THE DIRECTION THEY NEEDED.**

IGNORANT: Today we live in a generation that is ignorant of the teaching of the Word of God and we are suffering because of it. Many people have totally messed up their lives because they have not followed the directions found in the Word of God.

SEARCHING: Robin Greenfield is kind of an environmentalist California free spirit who is walking from Canada to Los Angeles. He is trying to heal his soul by "connecting with Mother Earth" in his words. It is a fascinating journey where he lives off of berries and edible plants and minor provisions. He documents it for thousands of viewers with video footage on line.

CONFESSION: He took time away from his trip to do a video confession. He said that when He was in college, he was very promiscuous and immoral. He is convicted that he took advantage of several women and he feels bad about it. He doesn't know how to find forgiveness so he thought confessing it on tape to thousands of viewers may get him some relief.

COMMENTS: I listened to him and then read the comments to find an outpouring of dozens of people who have done the same thing and have lived to regret it terribly. Men live with the guilt of pressuring girls they didn't love to have relations with them. Now they know it was very wrong to do. The bitter women responded with anger at allowing themselves to be used by these men, often under great pressure or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

UNIVERSAL: Our world is filled with people who have been immoral, stolen things, spoken hurtful words, taken drugs, damaged their brains and made foolish choices. They are depressed because they rejected God's Word and listened to the devil.

COMMANDMENTS: People are learning by painful experience that the Ten Commandments are very good to follow. God's Word always leads us on a good path to a good life:

- ***Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."***
- ***Psalm 119:130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.***

APPLICATION: If you want to have a good 2025, get into God's Word and follow God's ways. It leads to a life of no regrets. I read a statement this week from a famous preacher that said: *"Anything that gets between you and the Word of God is a bad thing."*

VERSE: The pastor at the church in Shell Lake, Wisconsin that we visited last Sunday with Pastor and Mrs. Richard Anderson urged us to find a Bible verse as a theme verse for 2025.

DRUGS: That Shell Lake Alliance pastor is helping many of the drug users in his area find a new life in Christ. Drugs, high unemployment, and hopelessness are epidemic in rural, small-town America. In Cumberland, two main manufacturing plants have moved to China and Mexico.

WORD: God's Word is the primary tool to help these discouraged unemployed drug addicts. Pastor Andy is helping by teaching two discipleship Bible classes a week to get the power of the Word of God working for these folks. **THE MAGI GOT WISDOM FROM THE WORD OF GOD.**

The third NEW YEAR LESSON FROM THE MAGI IS...

III. EPIPHANY: BE ALERT TO THE PROMPTINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew 2:9-12 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east 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 and of incense and of myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

SUPERNATURAL: At this point in the journey the supernatural takes over again. They got direction from the Word of God and then stepped out to go to Bethlehem. As they stepped out on the Word of God the star appeared and lead them to the very house where Mary, Joseph and the child were staying.

WARNING: After they honored Jesus, the King of the Jews, they got a warning from God in a dream to stay away from King Herod and go home by another route. I would like to use the ancient Word that the church has uses for this. That word is EPIPHANY. Tomorrow is January 6 which is Epiphany Day and the end of the Christmas season. It is that day that Joseph also got a supernatural message from God to flee to Egypt with the Christ child and stay until King Herod was dead. Here is the definition of Epiphany from the Webster's dictionary:

EPIPHANY (Webster): an usually sudden manifestation: an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.

ILLUMINATION: The Magi got their Epiphany from God. God illuminated their minds to know that this child was the Christ. God

illuminated their minds to escape evil Herod by another route. God illuminated the holy family to flee to Egypt.

ALERT: That same Holy Spirit of God is alive and well today and is illuminating God's people who are seeking God's direction for their lives. We need to be alert to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as God leads us in *"paths of righteousness for His Name's sake."*

MANIFEST: Later Jesus was manifest to the teachers in the temple with His wisdom and understanding. He was manifest to a wedding as his Word made water into wine. On Friday I saw a parade in Iran of Christians who were marching in perfect formation down the streets singing loud songs that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. IN IRAN WHERE IT IS ILLEGAL TO BE A CHRISTIAN! They probably were marching to their death. Most of them have converted from Islam to Jesus through dreams and visions and personal visitations of Christ Himself. People are still having Epiphanies, especially in places where there are no Bibles!

NOW: 2025 is going to be an amazing year. Maybe it is the year when the trumpet of God sounds and we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Maybe it is a year of worldwide revival. Maybe it is the year the prophecies will be fulfilled. Maybe it is the year that God uses you and me to win our friends, relatives and neighbors to Christ. Maybe it is the year we die and go to heaven. LEARN NEW YEAR LESSONS FROM THE MAGI:

- BE COURAGEOUS AND STEP OUT
- GET DIRECTION FROM THE WORD OF GOD
- EXPECT AN EPIPHANY AS YOU ARE SENSITIVE TO THE LEADING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Here is a summary by William Cary, the "father of modern missions." He paraphrased it this way: *"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." STEP OUT! May the peace*

of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Messiah Jesus. Amen

#304 “I Love to Tell the Story”

HOLY COMMUNION (Dave Fischer prep and help)

CHORAL BENEDICTION: *May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever-- Grant you peace, Perfect peace, Strength in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and see His face, Feel His grace forever. May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever.*

POSTLUDE: Ruth Antal