



**Birchcliff Bluffs United Church**

**Ministers:** All the People – wherever and however they gather

**Minister of Word & Sacrament:** Katie Vardy

**Music Director:** Randy Vancourt

**Reader:**

**January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**Second Sunday after Christmas**

**Celebrating Epiphany**

**WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE**

**Prelude**

**Welcome**

**Lighting the Christ Candle**

At the heart of our faith is a light that does not flicker out—a light born in love, a light that has learned the shape of human life, a light that calls us forward, even when the way is unclear.

Our Christ Candle serves as a reminder that the light of Christ shines not behind us in the past, but ahead of us, guiding our every step. *Candle is lit.*

**Lighting the Rainbow Candle**

We also light the Rainbow Candle—a symbol of God’s covenant love, wide enough to hold every body, every identity, and every story. Our rainbow light reminds us that our diversity is not an obstacle to God, but a reflection of God’s creativity and joy. *Candle is lit.*

**Land Acknowledgement**

As we gather in this season of Epiphany—a season of light, revelation, and awakening—we acknowledge the land on which we worship. This land has long been home to Indigenous peoples, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, the Chippewa, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. It is a land where wisdom has been shared, relationships tended, and stories carried across generations. We also acknowledge that this land remains home to many diverse Indigenous nations and communities, whose presence, resilience, and leadership continue to shape this place.

**May the light of Epiphany guide us toward truth, right relationships, and shared care for this land and for one another.**

- 1 When heaven's bright with mystery  
and science searches nature's art,  
when all creation yearns for peace  
and hope sinks deep in human hearts,  
appear to us, O Holy Light;  
lift from our eyes the shades of night.
- 2 When Herod barter power and lives  
and Rachel's weeping fills the night,  
when suffering's mask marks every face,  
and Love's a refugee in flight,  
reveal to us your word of grace  
and make us witness to your peace.
- 3 When fragile faith, like desert wind,  
blows dry and empty, hope erased,  
when withered grass and fading flower  
proclaim again our day's brief space,  
breathe on the clay of our despair  
and work a new creation there.
- 4 When heaven's bright with mystery  
and stars still lead an unknown way,  
when love still lights a gentle path  
where courts of power can hold no sway,  
there with the Magi, let us kneel,  
our gifts to share, God's world to heal.

**Call to Worship**

Arise, shine—for your light has come, and the glory of God rises among us.

**We gather, drawn by a light we cannot contain.**

From distant places and familiar roads, from questions and longings, from hope and hesitation—

**We come, seeking the Christ who meets us on the way.**

Nations come to the light, and hearts awaken to what is being revealed.

**We rise to worship, guided by love, led by light.**

**Passing the Peace**

In the Epiphany story, strangers become companions, and the journey is shared rather than walked alone. As we pass the peace, may we offer one another the blessing of welcome, connection, and trust.

The peace of Christ be with you. **And also with you!**

## Life and Work

### Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

**Holy and radiant God,  
you meet us not only at the destination, but on the road itself.  
You speak through stars and dreams, through curiosity and courage,  
through questions that refuse easy answers.  
As we gather in this season of Epiphany,  
open our eyes to the light already among us,  
our hearts to the truth unfolding within us,  
and our lives to the transformation you invite.  
Guide us, as you guided the Magi—  
not by certainty, but by wonder;  
not by power, but by love. Amen.**

### Hymn

#### All Poor Ones and Humble

VU 68

1 All poor ones and humble and all those who stumble,  
come hastening, and feel not afraid;  
for Jesus, our treasure, with love past all measure,  
in lowly poor manger was laid.

Though wise men who found him  
laid rich gifts around him,  
yet oxen they gave him their hay,  
and Jesus in beauty accepted their duty;  
contented in manger he lay.

Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him;  
our service he ne'er can despise;  
whose love still is able to show us that stable,  
where softly in manger he lies.

2 The Christ Child will lead us, the Good Shepherd feed us  
and with us abide till his day.  
Then hatred he'll banish; then sorrow will vanish,  
and death and despair flee away.

And he shall reign ever, and nothing shall sever  
from us the great love of our King;

his peace and his pity shall bless his fair city;  
his praises we ever shall sing.

Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him;  
our service he ne'er can despise;  
whose love still is able to show us that stable,  
where softly in manger he lies.

## RECEIVING GOD'S WORD

### Scripture     **Isaiah 60:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> Arise, shine, for your light has come! The glory of YHWH is rising upon you! <sup>2</sup> Though darkness still covers the earth and dense clouds enshroud the peoples, upon you, YHWH now dawns, and God's glory will be seen among you! <sup>3</sup> The nations will come to your light and the leaders to your bright dawn! <sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes and look around: they're all gathering and coming to you – your daughters and your sons journey from afar, escorted in safety; <sup>5</sup> you'll see them and beam with joy, your heart will swell with pride. The riches of the sea will flow to you, and the wealth of the nations will come to you – <sup>6</sup> camel caravans will cover your roads, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; everyone in Sheba will come, bringing gold, incense and singing the praise of YHWH.

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus' birth, which happened in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod, astrologers from the East arrived in Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the newborn ruler of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay homage." <sup>3</sup> At this news, Herod became greatly disturbed, as did all of Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> Summoning all the chief priests and religious scholars of the people, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem of Judea," they informed him. "Here is what the prophet has written: <sup>6</sup> 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, since from you will come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" <sup>7</sup> Herod called the astrologers aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, after having instructed them, "Go and get detailed information about the child. When you have found him, report back to me – so that I may go and offer homage, too." <sup>9</sup> After their audience with the ruler, they set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. <sup>10</sup> They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, <sup>11</sup> upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and paid homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented the child with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> They were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

The Word of God for the People of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

## Hymn

### We Three Kings of Orient Are

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

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

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

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.

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

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

## Sermon

### By Another Road

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

**Hymn**

**In the Bleak Mid-Winter**

**VU 55**

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;  
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed  
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,  
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air,  
but only his mother, in her maiden bliss,  
worshiped the Beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him - give my heart.

### Offering

In Epiphany, gifts are offered—not because they are required, but because love has been awakened. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were signs of trust, hope, and reverence for what God was doing in the world. As we offer our gifts today—of money, time, care, and commitment—may they reflect the light we have received and the justice we long to see revealed.

As we bless the offerings, let us sing:

**Offering Hymn**

**Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow**

**VU 541**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
praise God, all creatures high and low;  
give thanks to God in love made known:  
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

### COMMUNION

Friends, this is the table of Jesus Christ.  
It is not a table set for the perfect, but for those who hunger and thirst for life.  
It is not a table for the certain,  
but for those who are searching, wondering, and on the way.

At this table, strangers become companions,  
and all are welcome—just as they are.  
Come, for all is ready.

Holy Love be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up with joy and with thanksgiving.**

It is a blessing to be in the world with joy, thanks, and courage.

**We take up Holy Love with eagerness and humility.**

We come to this table with joy and thanksgiving,  
for you are the source of all light and life.  
From the beginning, you spoke light into the world.  
You guided your people through wilderness and uncertainty,  
and you placed signs in the heavens to lead seekers toward hope.

In the fullness of time, you came among us in Jesus—  
a light not born of power, but of love.  
A light that welcomed the stranger, healed the wounded,  
and revealed your grace in ordinary places.

Therefore, with all who have followed your light—  
with those who have gone before us  
and those who walk beside us now—  
we join our voices in gratitude and praise.

**Holy, holy, holy God,**

**O God of time and space.**

**All earth and sea and sky above  
bear witness to your grace.**

**Hosanna in the highest heaven,  
creation sings your praise.**

**And blessed is the One who comes  
and bears your name always.**

We celebrate Jesus' birth to ordinary people living in an occupied state,  
his baptism in the waters of the Jordan, his commitment to your vision for humanity,  
his ministry among the hurting and dispossessed people of his day,  
his happy habit of inviting himself to dinner with anyone and everyone,  
his communing with vast crowds in outbursts of generosity and sharing,  
and his challenge to those with power to remember the covenant.

We remember his meal in an upper room long ago,  
heralding liberation and naming his family,  
offering an understanding of your communion with humankind, O Holy Love.

He took bread after the meal, gave thanks,  
broke it and blessed it, as we do here,  
and invited his friends to share in the great banquet of love.

Then he took a cup, and in the same way gave thanks  
for earth and workers and the Creator for this gift from the vine.  
He filled the cup and invited those around him to enter again into the covenant of love  
as a sign that love is stronger than fear, even stronger than death.  
And so, we remember—the mystery and the miracle:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

In our time and in this place, we do likewise —  
taking ordinary ingredients and offering them to one another in love  
as the taste of freedom, of togetherness, of eager hope.  
More than a loaf and a cup, we offer our own selves as living bread,  
to be in the world as Jesus was, as yeast, salt, and light.

**We pour ourselves out for a world more just,  
more peaceful, more true to the vision of security for all.**

Let us pray:  
Send your Spirit, O God, to transform these gifts.  
May the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup  
make us all participants in Christ's great work  
of feeding the multitude, healing what is broken, and resisting oppression.  
Nourish us with the bread of justice-seeking  
and the wine of celebration and thanksgiving,  
that we may live into God's promised realm of shalom, salaam, peace.

As we come to share new life here at the table,  
we remember others, some near and some far away,  
who wait for a crust of bread or a cup of acceptance, safety, or respect.  
We lift up those with mental, spiritual, or physical health needs,  
those who are trapped in places of conflict and fear,  
those struggling with identity or unaware of how loved they are,  
that deep peace may come to all people and nations.

Receive now the prayers of our hearts:



*(a time of silent prayer)*

We pray for ourselves, Ancient of Days,  
that we may have your word within us to calm us,  
inspire us, and heal us in these days of wonder, lament, and opportunity.

**Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,  
in unity with the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours,  
God most holy, now and forever.**

Come, beloved of God, the table is prepared.  
Bread is broken in love; the cup is poured in grace.  
Whether your faith is strong or fragile,  
whether you come with certainty or questions,  
whether you come from near or far—here you are welcomed.  
Here you belong. Taste and see that God is good.

### **SHARING THE MEAL**

*(Please come forward through the middle aisle to receive the elements. Once you receive the elements, do not eat them yet! Please return to your seat through the outer aisles of the sanctuary. Once everyone has been served, we will share the feast together. During the singing of our closing hymn, we will collect the cups.)*

The body of Christ,  
**the bread of life.**  
*(eat the bread)*

The New Covenant,  
**the cup of blessing.**  
*(drink the juice)*

The gifts of God for the people of God.  
**Thanks be to God!**

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Let us pray:

**God of grace and glory,  
you have fed us with hope, renewed us in community,  
and reminded us that we do not journey alone.  
Send us now into the world—  
guided by your light, strengthened by your love,  
and ready to follow Christ by whatever road faithfulness requires.  
Amen.**

Grateful for the life you give us, thankful for your Holy Son,  
joyful in your Spirit flowing over all, O God of Love.  
Grateful for the Bread of Heaven, thankful for your Holy Word,  
joyful in your mercy flowing, we will praise you.

### Prayers of the People

Guiding God,  
you have set your light among us,  
and still the world longs for its warmth.

We pray for places overshadowed by fear and violence—  
for communities living with war, displacement,  
and systems that deny dignity and belonging.  
May your light rise where hope feels distant.

We pray for leaders and nations,  
that they may choose wisdom over domination,  
truth over fear,  
and paths that lead toward peace rather than power.

We pray for all who are on uncertain journeys—  
those discerning new directions,  
those carrying grief into this new year,  
those wondering if the light they see can be trusted.  
Meet them, as you met the Magi,  
with guidance enough for the next faithful step.

We pray for this community,  
called to follow the light together.  
Give us courage to live what we proclaim,  
to seek justice with humility,  
and to return by different roads  
when love asks it of us.

Gathering these prayers—spoken and unspoken—  
we turn now to the words Jesus taught us.  
Let us pray, using the words most familiar to us:

**Our Creator, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kin-dom come,  
your 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 yours is the kin-dom,  
the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.

## BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

The First Noel

VU 91

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

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

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.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
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.

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

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest;  
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
and there it did both stop and stay,  
right over the place where Jesus lay.

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

5 Then entered in those wise men three,

full reverently upon their knee,  
and offered there in his presence  
their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

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

6 Then let us all with one accord  
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,  
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,  
and with his blood our life hath bought.

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

### **Bread for the Journey**

Where might the light of Christ be inviting you to take “another road” this year—even if the way forward feels unfamiliar or uncertain?

### **Commissioning**

The light has been revealed.

**We will not hide it.**

The journey continues.

**We will walk it with courage and compassion.**

God calls us to follow love, even when the path changes.

**We go, guided by light, returning by another way.**

### **Benediction**

May the light that led the Magi shine before you and within you.

May it guide your steps, soften your fears,  
and draw you toward justice, wonder, and peace.

Go now—not simply back to where you came from,  
but forward, changed by the light you have encountered.

Amen.

### **Choral Benediction**

### **I Am the Light of the World (v. 1 & 2)**

**VU 87**

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and the shepherds have found  
their way home,  
the work of Christmas is begun:

“I am the light of the world!  
You people come and follow me!”  
If you follow and love  
you’ll learn the mystery  
of what you were meant to do and be.

“I am the light of the world!  
You people come and follow me!”  
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of what you were meant to do and be.

## **Postlude**

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