

January 4, 2026

The Epiphany of Our Lord

Matthew 2:1-12

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA

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Christmas Season, Epiphany Lives

My family had a great Christmas Day. The presents were beautifully wrapped, if I do say so myself, and everyone was excited about what was in them, even the dog and the cat. Britton made his familiar and delicious Christmas Day brunch, and it was just as good as I remembered it being. For the first time in a long time, we weren't hosting Christmas dinner, so in the evening we went to Morgan and Mark's house for more Christmas presents and a wonderful Christmas dinner. It was a wonderful day, full, happy, and tiring, but in a good way, a "so much fun" kind of way.

The next day was Friday, and I had to get up early to take Cyrus to basketball practice at 7:45 a.m. What were his coaches thinking, scheduling a 7:45 a.m. basketball practice the day after Christmas? But he had been sick before Christmas and had missed a lot of practices, so he had to go to this one. We also had a lot to do to get ready for guests that were flying in that night, Britton's parents, Nancy and Larry, and his sister, Wendy, and her husband, Joe. It was back to the races to get the house ready, to get their presents wrapped, to get ready to celebrate all twelve days of Christmas.

As you might remember it was cold the day after Christmas, so I went over to church after delivering Cyrus to basketball practice and running a couple of errands. I wanted to be sure that the pipes were in good shape, knowing that we weren't going to be following our usual heating schedule during the school break and during a time when the church wasn't going to be used and heated following our usual weekly activity schedule either. So, I opened cabinet doors, to expose our pipes to the building's resting heat of 55 degrees, closed the downstairs bathroom

doors, and turned on a space heater in the storage closet where the water enters the building.

The building was silent and empty and cold. I had a lot to do that day, so I was racing through my tasks, wanting to get everything finished as quickly as possible so that I could go on about my day. I ran downstairs using the steps outside the sacristy, checked on the boiler, took care of the bathrooms and the space heater, then came up the narthex stairs and walked into the sanctuary—and I found Christmas waiting for me. Heart stopping, jaw dropping, Christmas. “Fall on your knees, O hear the angels voices” Christmas.

And in the peace, the calm, the beauty of a Christmas that was not my job or my responsibility to create, to make magical, to pay for with money, with blood, sweat, and tears, actual tears came to my eyes as I was confronted by the gift of Christmas—a baby in a manger, the voice of God in the sound of sheer silence, not a silent night, but a silent morning, and in the silence, in the manger, I experienced the wonder, the joy, the miracle of Christmas. God come to be with us.

A gift. Not something we buy and pay for, not something we have to work for, not something we have to imagine, but just here, for us. And for the past 10 days, that has been what I have been trying to remember, to celebrate as the world has been moving on, into a new year, a world where it seems that far too few people have heard or believed the angels’ songs of peace.

They have finally made it. Those wise ones from the east, who have been travelling for long weary weeks, perhaps months, perhaps years following a star. The journey that our ceramic wise men have made through our sanctuary pales in comparison to the journey the actual wise ones of scripture made, crossing mountain ranges, deserts, rivers, to bring gifts to a newborn king.

In our nativity scene tableau, the wise men have joined shepherds and sheep and Mary and Joseph in a stable, where Jesus was lying in a manger, but in the scriptural account the wise ones came much later, when Mary and Joseph and Jesus

were in a house far more settled than they were for Jesus' tumultuous birth. But still, I wonder if he was what they were expecting.

My guess is that they expected the star to lead them to Jerusalem. My guess is that they expected Herod to show them his own newborn son, born in one of his palaces, to introduce them to his own offspring as the new king of the Jews. I suspect that they experienced a certain amount of confusion when they found themselves in Jerusalem in a king's palace and found that no one knew what they were talking about and they still had to ask for directions. The star didn't lead them where they were expecting.

When they finally found Jesus, a simple child, with his simple mother, living in a simple house, they found Christmas, God come to be with us, and they found Epiphany, God made known in Jesus to the world, to Jews and Gentiles, to rich and poor, to brave and fearful, to the hopeful and the hopeless.

And, of course, what happened next, the horror story of Christmas, should come as no surprise to us. Because we live in this world. We know how it acts. We know what happens when power is threatened, when people fear the loss of their position, their privilege, their status. God came to be with us in Jesus, the baby, and of course Herod tried to kill him, killing instead the boy babies of Bethlehem, who were collateral damage in the struggle between the powers of this world and the presence of God.

The angels sang songs of peace on the night of Jesus birth, but we head into this new year, with the cries of the mothers of Bethlehem, of Gaza, of Sudan, of Ukraine, of Venezuela, of refugee camps, of detention centers, of homeless shelters, of our own city streets, ringing in our ears.

Over the next few weeks, the Christmas lights will go out. People will take down their Christmas decorations. The Christmas trees will be packed up in basements or attics or left on curbs to be taken away. The Christmas cards will stop coming, even from those friends or family who are notoriously late getting them in

the mail. The snow and cold will continue, but it will start to feel less atmospheric and more like a nuisance as our hearts and bodies will start to yearn for spring and as we realize just how far away it still is. Over the next few days and weeks and months we will continue to see how much the power of hatred and of fear dominates so much of our world and our lives and we really can't even imagine what will happen next. But we can guess, based on past experience that it will be loud and frightening and the temptation to despair will be great. What do we have in the face of the worst that the world can do?

Well, together we have seen Christmas, the gift and the miracle that is Christmas:

the fierce and strong trust of Mary, that through her, that through her child, God would transform the world,
the obedience and courage of Joseph,
the joy of shepherds,
the songs of angels, promising peace and good will,
and the wonder of the wise, kneeling at the feet of an seemingly ordinary and yet extraordinary child.

We have seen Christmas, and no matter that the powers of this world say, it is still true. God is with us and it is God's will that will prevail.

And we are invited to live Epiphany lives, lives that shine the light of Jesus' presence in the world, lives that share the good news that God with us and with the whole world. We are invited to travel different roads, to speak and live hope and light and glory and love, in our homes and our workplaces, in our schools and all of the places where our lives take us. We are invited to let the light of Christ shine through us in the dark places of the world, to continue to sing angels' songs, to live in the hope and joy of shepherds, who have seen the Lord, even when hope

and joy feel like foolish responses to the suffering and struggles of the world. We are invited to follow Jesus, who is the star of our lives. Christmas is almost over, but the light that dawns on a weary world continues to shine. Let us walk in the hope of that light into this new year. Amen.