

Order of Service - Sunday, January 04, 2026

Epiphany: A New Year, a New Vision

Most of this Service was written by David Sparks, a retired United Church of Canada minister

The theme of today is how the Epiphany is represented by the United Church of Canada's motto:

Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice

How do we honour this motto in our daily lives?

Lighting of the Christ Candle As we light the Christ Candle, let us pause and reflect that Jesus' light is with us, always.

Welcome Welcome one and all. Happy New Year! Let us join together today and celebrate the Epiphany. The Magi were drawn to Jesus' birthplace by a light in the sky. Many years later, we are here, drawn to celebrate Jesus in our lives. All are welcome here.

Announcements:

Passing the Peace Today, we observe the tradition of passing the Peace. It serves to reinforce, in the presence of the whole community, that we are not alone. You may wish to offer "The Peace" by folding your arms over your chest to indicate a hug, by folding hands in prayer to indicate a blessing to another, by a fist bump, or by simply bowing in mutual respect.

L: The peace of Christ be with you all.

P: And also with you.

Praise Hymn **Dance with the Spirit**, MVU # 156

Dance with the Spirit early in the mornin',
Walk with the Spirit throughout the long day.
Work and hope for the new life a-bornin',
Listen to the Spirit to show you the way.

Call to Worship: Called to a Spirit Journey

L: You call us to a journey of the Spirit, Loving God.

P: As we prepare, you speak, and we listen.

L: You call us to a journey of the Spirit, Loving God.

P: Our goal is clear; we seek the highest good.

L: You call us to a journey of the Spirit, Loving God.

P: We are not alone; our faith companions go with us.

L: You call us to a journey of the Spirit, Loving God.

P: You are our guide; we have nothing to fear. Amen.

Ministry of Music **I Know Who Holds Tomorrow** with revised lyrics written by Anne Griffin

Gathering Prayer - A Prayer of Bold Discipleship

L: Loving God, in our discipleship we will be bold.

P: As bold disciples, we will listen carefully to those who experience life differently from us.

L: In our discipleship we will be bold.

P: As bold disciples, we will work out our own faith and explore that of other faith communities.

L: In our discipleship we will be bold.

P: As bold disciples, we will meet with the powerful ones but will not submit to them.

L: In our discipleship we will be bold.

P: As bold disciples, we will experience love in a little child and will humbly worship. Amen.

Gathering Hymn *I Am the Light of the World*, VU # 87

Refrain	When the song of	To find the lost and	To free the prisoner	To bring hope to
I am "the light of the	the angels is stilled,	lonely one,	from all chains,	every task you do,
world!	When the star in the	To heal the broken	To make the	To dance at a
You people come	sky is gone,	soul with love,	powerful care,	baby's new birth,
and follow me!"	When the kings and	To feed the hungry	To rebuild the	To make music in
If you follow and	the shepherds	children	nations	an old person's
love you'll learn the	have found their	With warmth and	With strength of	heart,
mystery	way home,	good food,	good will,	And sing to the
Of what you were	The work of	To feel the earth	To see God's	colours of the earth!
meant to do and be.	Christmas is begun.	below, the sky	children	Refrain
	Refrain	above!	everywhere!	
		Refrain	Refrain	

Canadian Food Grains Bank video

Offering Prayer *Invite the children now bring up the gifts*

L: We offer our gifts to nurture the faithful journey of this community.

P: We offer our money to sustain its teaching and worship. We offer our time for compassionate care. We offer our talents to support its work for justice.

L: As these gifts are used in this fellowship, and worldwide through Mission and Service,

P: Loving God, you will bless them, and you will bless us, the givers. In the name of Jesus, who could not have given more, we pray. Amen.

Offering Song *Draw the Circle Wide*, MV # 145 (verse 2 only)

Let our hearts touch far horizons,
so encompass great and small;
Let our loving know no borders,
faithful to God's call.
Draw the circle wide.

Draw it wider still.
Let this be our song,
No one stands along,
Standing side by side.

Children's Ministry *Seek and Find Christmas Book*

Children's Prayer & Song -from VU # 55, verse 4

Dear God: The Wise Men brought gifts to give to the baby Jesus. 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 can I give him - give my heart.

Lord's Prayer *sung*

Children leave for Sunday School

A Prayer before Scripture

L: Touch us with your Word, Loving God,

P: stir up within us fresh ways of enlivening your Word for our day.

L: Hold us with your Word, Loving God,

P: challenge us as we search for your way in our faith community.

L: Shake us with your Word, Loving God,

P: set us ablaze with a determination to be bolder disciples. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6 The Glory of Zion (NIV)

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. "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 hip. 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. 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.

Matthew 2:1–12 The Magi Visit the Messiah (NIV)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "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 shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

A Prayer after Scripture

L: We thank you for your Word, Loving God,

P: gracious words that tell of your presence.

L: We thank you for your Word, Loving God,

P: enlivening words that enthuse and affirm.

L: We thank you for your Word, Loving God,

P: familiar words that faithfully inspire

L: We thank you for your Word, Loving God,

P: challenging words that are surprising and heartening.

L: Living God, we thank you for your Word.

P: Amen.

Message An Epiphany Reflection in Light of the Call and Vision Statement of the United Church

The United Church of Canada, our church, deliberated, came to a conclusion, and now we have a Call and Vision. Here it is: **"Deep Spirituality. Bold Discipleship. Daring Justice."**

These six words are our call as a United Church. And they go with a vision:

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

Sounds great, sounds challenging, but whatever has it to do with the season of Epiphany that we are in, and the often-told, often-sung story of the magi that we heard earlier? (*sing:*) "We three Kings of Orient are,/Bearing gifts we traverse so far..."

A good question! It deserves a good answer, and I'll do my best. You got a few minutes?

Let's begin by looking at the season of the church year that we are beginning today: Epiphany. It's the time of a great insight. One description of Epiphany's importance is that Epiphany is like the insight that came when Newton experienced the apple falling and then formulated the concept of gravity.

Wait a minute, the gravity thing is “hugely important,” but was Epiphany a historical incident? Were there actually historical Magi on a quest, or was the story about how the Queen of Sheba pays homage to King Solomon been modified by the gospel writer Matthew?

Wrong question! This is not just a story of some “wise guys” going off on a whim and following a moving comet. The story makes clear that risk was involved, risk to life and limb in coming to see the baby Jesus. Herod was a powerful and nasty character, yet the magi made the journey anyways. It was of supreme importance to them.

I get it. To go back to the new United Church Call and Vision, the story is gently reminding us that it isn't the state of the economy that matters most, or holidays in exotic places, or our financial or workplace success, it is what we have going for us in the realm of spirituality, **deep spirituality**. The magi found their goal - the birthplace of the baby Jesus - and they gave the baby appropriate and valuable gifts. You don't give presents worth that much to someone who isn't vital. Jesus is central to their quest, and he is on the receiving end of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, valuable gifts for the time.

And **more** than that, we are *united* in our spirituality. We find it and we share it in the faith community. The magi got it right.

But wait a minute, we set out to see whether our church's Call and Vision had relevance to the Epiphany story. I get the point about spirituality, even deep spirituality, but there is nothing in the story about the magi becoming disciples. The second part of the Call and Vision relates to disciples, and bold ones at that. Okay, remember you are not dealing with history. This is likely a very good story. Let's look a little further into the gospel account of Matthew to read the call of disciples Andrew and Simon Peter, and James and John, sons of Zebedee.

Throughout Matthew's gospel the training and work of the disciples has a prominent place. Not far into the gospel of Matthew (**Matt. 10:9–15**) there is an account of a training program for the disciples, which even includes a section on what to do when rejection comes your way.

But what about now?

If ever there was a time for developing a bold program for a new local program for evangelization, using Facebook and other social media, it is today (or maybe yesterday!). You could try it!

Fair enough! But what about the part of “Daring justice”?

Well, you have read the story. It's about magi, sages - dedicated, recognized, but way down the power ladder - taking on King Herod, ruler and supreme leader of his time, and the underdogs coming out on top. In the story we are all rooting for the magi to get their gifts to Jesus and get away from Herod, and for once the right people are on the winning side! Alleluia!

Very well and good, but do you have some daring justice stories that tell what the church has been up to recently?

Actually, I have. Grace Café came and spoke to us about the clients they serve at the Café. That talk changed many people in the congregation's attitude towards the un-housed, poverty, and drug addiction. And the guest who came in September and spoke to us about Israel and Palestine, specifically the Occupied Territory, that still left many of us with questions, but at least we were talking and thinking about the issue.

So to sum it all up, what emerges from the ancient story at the beginning of Matthew's gospel as it relates to the Call and Vision statement?

What we have in this magi story in the Epiphany, what we as church people have in the birth of Jesus, is of huge fundamental importance. It calls on us to take the Call and Vision statement seriously:

It calls us to deepen our spirituality.

It calls us to be emboldened as disciples.

It calls us to be daring as we strive for justice.

Are you up to the challenge? Am I? Amen.

Prayers of the People - A Prayer of Daring

L: Loving God, there are opportunities for us to work and advocate for cleaner air and cleaner water. (*Time of silent reflection*) As those who believe the environment matters way beyond our lifetime,

P: we will dare to get involved.

L: Loving God, the never-ending procession of refugees fills us with horror. (*Time of silent reflection*) As those who believe that every family has the right to a safe home,

P: we will dare to get involved.

L: Loving God, we are among those who are ignored and looked down on because of an addiction. (*Time of silent reflection*) As those who have a difficult story to tell,

P: we will dare to get involved.

P: Loving God, we know those who are going through hard times with sickness, in relationships, and because dreams will not become reality. (*Time of silent reflection*) As those who are ready to listen and act compassionately,

P: we will dare to get involved.

P: Loving God, we rejoice in this faith community, our work in this neighbourhood, and our outreach through the Mission and Service. (*Time of silent reflection*) As those who, in community, are ready to renew and commit time, talents, and gifts,

P: we will dare to get involved

L: Loving God, we give thanks for our Christian faith. Our faith has been a rock, is a source of strength, and will be a beacon of hope in all the years that lie ahead. (*Time of silent reflection*) As individuals, we acknowledge all that is ours in Jesus the Christ.

P: We dare to witness, "Yes, I am faithfully involved!" Amen.

Hymn of Faith Will You Come and See the Light? VU # 96

Will you come and see the light from the stable door? It is shining newly bright, thought it shone before. It will be your guiding star, it will show you who you are: Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?	Will you step into the light that can free the slave? It will stand for what is right, it will heal and save. By the pyramids of greed there's a longing to be freed; Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?	Will tell about the light in the prison cell? Thought it's shackled out of sight, it is shining well. When the truth is cut and bruised, and the innocent abused, Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?	Will you join the hope, alight in the young girl's eyes Of the mighty put to flight by a baby's cries? When the lowest and the least are the foremost at the feats, Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?	Will you travel by the light of the babe new born? In the candle lit at night there's a gleam of dawn, And the darkness all about is too dim to put it out: Will you hide, or decide to meet the light?
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An Act of Faithful Commitment for a New Year

L: Follow the star! The light of Jesus Christ will be our light in the new year. We will study faithfully and listen patiently. We will proclaim Jesus joyfully and care compassionately. We will play our part in the faith community fully and pursue justice with daring.

P: You will go with God,

L: and God will go with us.

P: Thanks be to God!

Parting Hymn Arise, Your Light is Come, VU # 79

Arise, your light is come! The spirit's call obey; Show forth the glory of your God, Which shines on you today.	Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door; Proclaim the captive's liberty, Good tidings to the poor.	Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born, Bind up the broken hearted ones And comfort those who mourn.	Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song! Rise up like eagles on the wing; God's pow'r will make us strong.
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A Commissioning for the New Year

L: You go into a new year with us, Loving God,

P: with us as we explore new adventures of faith.

L: You go into the new year with us, Loving God,

P: with us as we test the depth of our spirituality.

L: You go into the new year with us, Loving God,

P: with us as we are emboldened as disciples of Jesus the Christ.

L: You go into the new year with us, Loving God,

P: with us as we dare to confront and overcome injustice, with us on our personal quest, with us as we draw strength and go forward as faith communities.

L: We will suffer setbacks, we will encounter challenges, we will feel like giving up, we will say, "What's the use?" But you, Loving God, will forge us in hope; you will renew our strength. With us when life is good,

P: with us when life is tough, our Never-Failing God. Amen.

Choral Benediction **Sent Out in Jesus' Name**, MVU # 212 (*Spoken*)

Sent out in Jesus' name, our hands are ready now
To make the world the place in which the kingdom comes.
The angels cannot change a world of hurt and pain
Into a world of love, of justice and of peace.
The task is ours to do, to set it really free.
O, help us to obey, and carry out your will.

Choral Amen

Extinguish the Christ Candle