



We are
Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge and
Knox Didsbury Pastoral Charge
of the United Church of Canada



Sunday January 2nd, 2022

Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan

Musician today: Janice and Barry Beaudry (Knox /Olds)

Our mission statements:

Olds: A Family of Faith, Spiritually Motivated, Welcoming and Caring

Sundre: Believing, Caring, Sharing

Knox Didsbury: Caring, Sharing, Believing

As we worship we gratefully acknowledge that our churches are all located on the ancient and traditional lands of The Blackfoot Nation, the people of the Treaty 7, and of Metis Region 3.

May we cherish and care for these lands and the people, just as those who came before us have done.

Prelude

Announcements

-Coffee time – Tuesdays at 10:00, resumes this week. Zoom link in Friday's email.

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Lighting the Christ Candle

We gather in the Season of Light, Epiphany, to celebrate the light that shines in our lives eternally. We light this candle, praying that hope, love and light may fill our hearts.

Call to Worship

A star shining brightly in the east,

Discovered by those who had eyes to see the unusual and the challenging.

A journey into unknown territory,

Taken by those who have courage and curiosity.

An encounter with an evil, commanding presence,

A presence resisted with care.

The Holy One, recognized, in spite of humble origins,

Given gifts and glory to the Child of God.

Come, let us to worship, to the glory of God.

Hymn VU 79 Arise Your Light is Come

Opening Prayer

God of all life, starlight is our night companion – a gift of wonder – that helped direct ancient ones on their journey, and helps us to reflect on our own. May we know your presence among us as we worship this day. Amen.

Time with the Children in all of Us

Have the kids tell the Christmas story with you...

Move to the story of the Magi...how many were there? Maybe...we know there were 3 gifts....Some of our gift giving tradition comes from this story.

What kinds of gifts did you get for Christmas this year?

What kind of gifts would you bring...if you could bring Jesus a gift?

Hymn VU 87 I am the Light of the World

Readings

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Images of light – symbolic of the season of Epiphany – abound in this passage. It speaks of the hopes for Israel, as the exiled peoples returned from Babylon.

Arise, 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. ⁷All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall be acceptable on my altar, and I will glorify my glorious house. ⁸Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?

⁹For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the Lord your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you.

Matthew 2:1-12

Today's gospel reading tells of the coming of the Wise Ones, or Magi, to see the Christ Child. It is in this story that we begin to get a hint of Herod's fear of the implications of this birth on his rule.

In 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.

Reflection

We are still in the season of Christmas, and we also find ourselves just barely into the new year. It is a time when so many of us make commitments to change – resolutions; promises to do things differently; to better ourselves or some aspect of how we live in the world.

How many of you have done so – made a resolution or two for 2022? Or are you like some people – who chose to keep their resolution making a secret – so that only you will know if you make it or break it?

It is a new year, a new beginning. And...we also find ourselves approaching the day of Epiphany – officially January 6th, and often celebrated on this first Sunday of the church year.

Epiphanies, by definition, are sudden realizations or intuitive new understandings of ordinary occurrences. They are often associated with the image of light, with light being a metaphor for the transformation of a simple reality into a new, brighter awareness.

In the church, Epiphany celebrates the coming of the magi, those influential leaders, who, as the story says, follow the light of a star to find Jesus; and rejoice in the revelation of God in unexpected places.

And still today – we can find God in unexpected places; if only we are open to seeing. That's the interesting aspect – are we open to really seeing the Holy as it is revealed to us?

As I reflect on the biblical story of Jesus' birth and the coming of the magi, what stands out for me in relation to that openness is the idea of the unexpected ways that God is revealed to the characters in the story.

And yet, how easy it could be to dismiss those revelations.

In the biblical story – Elizabeth learns from an angel that her yet to be born child will be the one who prepares the way for Jesus;

Mary and Joseph both learn of the coming of their child through messages from angels.

The shepherds too, receive the invitation to go and see the new born child from angels.

The story moves with the angels – the angels lead the way – and those who are the recipients of their grace-filled messages are open to following. They are open to experiencing the new, the awesome, the mysterious wonders that the angels promise them.

Later in the story, God reveals a message to the magi through a dream – that message to return to their home by another route, in order to avoid the encounter with the trouble Herod would bring. A dream. Really? Yet they are open to heeding the message of that dream, and acting upon it.

Later still in the story, we know that Joseph learns in a dream to take Jesus and leave, to go to Egypt, and then another dream tells him when it is safe to return.

Dreams and angels – revelations of the voice of God. Some call it the still small voice. I found myself, this week, reflecting on what it means to trust dreams and intuitions, to trust that they are, indeed, the voice of God; that the still small voice is truly speaking.

I don't just mean to the biblical characters either. Can we trust those times that we receive messages from God...you and I? Are we open to heeding those messages?

As I reflected, I found myself remembering some of the experiences of sharing leadership with small groups, particularly groups that were under going a process of discernment or goal setting for the future, and seeking God's wisdom in the process.

One group in particular met over several weeks, and focused on the question "What's my dream, and what's God got to do with it?"

Together we shared some of our own dreams or visions of our sense of call – and of what the still, small voice might be saying to each of us. Together, we

helped each other discern where God was calling us to focus our gifts, in order to better serve humanity. Sounds like a lofty piece of work, at face value, doesn't it?

Groups like that can be inspiring, as together you support one another in seeking clarity, in seeking light and being led by that light. They can be places that offer a sense of being held in support, as the group reflects on the shared journey.

Imagine what it might have been like for the magi. Some inspiration caused them to start off on the journey together. There may have been some direction by Herod to go and find this promised new king, but I like to believe that some sort of inspiration kept those magi travelling along the way, persisting through what may well have been a challenging and long journey.

It was a journey to find the source of that mysterious star, that unknown light. Wouldn't you imagine that there would have been all kinds of rich, rich conversation, about the greater things in life, about the source of the mystery; about what might lie ahead as they made their way to see this long promised one.

Then imagine the reflective dialogue as they made their way home after seeing the child, and sharing their gifts. Imagine the conversations as they decided to change their pathway towards the return home.

Imagine too, what it must have been for Mary and Joseph – two poor young new parents. It would have been overwhelming enough, being a new parent; never mind all the attention brought to them by those who came to see their wondrous child.

So much drama surrounding the birth – first, to be those two young individuals, acting outside the norms of behavior for their community; young, unwed, about to become parents...Joseph could well have declared it an impossible situation, and left Mary behind; and he would have been behaving according to the ways of his day.

And then, to risk travel with Mary, so far along in her pregnancy. So much could have gone wrong. Really, it was beyond reason. It just didn't make sense.

But impossibility, risk and reason didn't factor in to this story. Not at all. This story was about listening to the voice of God, and trusting in that voice. This story was about trusting that the direction being offered was the way to go. So, trusting with all their hearts that God was leading them, lighting the way, they travelled. They accepted God's call to live as new life, as parents of this promised child.

The Magi – they too must have questioned at some point on the way. Did they wonder at how impossible their journey may turn out to be? Did they fear the risks involved in such a journey...or the risk involved in by-passing Herod on the way back? Did they ever wonder what point there was in all of this? Perhaps. But as the story goes- they too were able to follow the still small voice, and to trust their hearts, as they journeyed on.

We look ahead to a new year. The last couple have certainly brought unexpected challenges. Most of us have not ever experienced a pandemic. Our lives have had been affected in all sorts of ways.

As we enter 2022, what is God's still small voice calling to us to be about? What path is God pointing to for us to follow, as individuals, as communities of faith, as communities within our geographic context? Are there obstacles that cause us to doubt the possibilities that lie ahead? Are there risks involved? We've certainly learned through living with this pandemic that life is full of surprises, risks, and unexpected adventures.

How is God revealing God-self to you? Is your heart open to hearing the still small voice; to trusting in God's call for you?

How is God revealing God-self to us as people of faith, working together in a relatively new relationship as 3 churches sharing in mission and ministry? Are we open to hearing the still, small voice of God as we work and worship together?

What epiphany moments lie in store for you? For me? For us as a community of faith?

How is God calling us to shine our light on the world? How is God calling us to serve humanity?

As we struggle with those questions, may we listen to one another; to the voice of God speaking amongst us, and through us.

May we be open to discerning the path that leads us to finding hope incarnate - God with us, Emmanuel, revealed in light and love, for the world to see. And may we have courage and energy to journey together. May it be so.

Hymn VU 96 Will You Come and See the Light

This Week's Minute for Mission
Our Christian faith calls us to think deeply about giving.



Credit: Photo: gerald from Pixabay

Published On: December 1, 2021

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are the gifts the magi presented to baby Jesus in Matthew's Christmas story. Each of these gifts was highly symbolic. In Jesus' day, gold was typically a gift given to kings or people of high social class. Frankincense was burned during sacrifice offerings and worship services. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of those who died.

The magi recognized who Jesus was—important, worthy of worship, and someone who would pay the ultimate sacrifice. Their gifts were given to honour him. Their gifts were thoughtful and intentional.

While we may round up our tab at the cash register to give to a charity, our Christian faith also calls us to think deeply about giving. God calls us to discipleship, which means carving out time to reflect spiritually on what we are able to give. When we reflect on generosity as part of our spiritual practice, our giving becomes even more deeply intentional and meaningful.

And while it may be true that the people we support through Mission & Service need our generosity, we give as a way of honouring them. By working in partnership with trusted Mission & Service partners, we pay homage to, learn, and benefit from the resourcefulness, resilience, and giftedness of those receiving our financial support.

As the old adage goes, "Giving is a two-way street."

How will you commit yourself to give generously, thoughtfully, and intentionally in this new year?

After the wisemen encountered Jesus and laid their gifts before him, they weren't the same. The story goes that they went home by another road. In other words, their life took a new path.

May we too be changed by our connection with the spirit of Jesus, and in 2022 may generosity set us on an even deeper, more meaningful path.

As always, thank you for your **Mission & Service** support.

Offertory Music VU 538 For the Gift of Creation

Offertory Prayer

O God, we offer our talents, skills, and our very being to do your work in the world. May what we bring help to shine the light of love in our communities and beyond. Bless our gifts, we pray. Amen.

Prayers for the Day

Gracious God, whose light persistently breaks forth into our lives, we give you thanks this day, for the many gifts we receive from you.

We are grateful for simple things: warm beds on cold nights; food on the table; coats to keep us warm, the gradual lengthening of the hours of day light each day.

We give you thanks for special times and holidays in which we share the love of family and the ties of friendship. Even with the restrictions of COVID, this year, we were able to expand our Christmas circle some, and spend time with loved ones.

We pray for safe travels as people return to work and daily routines. It is with hope in our hearts that we pray for an end to the variants of COVID, and to safe return to school for teachers and students.

And, we thank you today, for Jesus, your child, whose birth marks the breaking in of your realm, the age of light, of hope, of peace and justice which you are bringing.

May we be so inspired by your presence with us, that we seek ways, as the magi did, to share our gifts with the world, and to seek justice in all that we do.

As we hear, O God, stories of war and conflict; situations of domestic violence, of people hungry or without safe shelter, our hearts ache with the hopelessness, and even at times, fear. May your light of hope and justice shine forth, we pray.

Help us to be agents of your love, teach us to pray and serve and hope, for we believe that what is impossible for us alone is possible with you, working through your people in community. Help us to be light and love where ever we can.

We lift to you those close to us whose lives need your healing touch.

We lift up the hurts of all who suffer from broken relationships, depression, lost jobs, isolation, illness, grief.

We think of the people of Colorado who have been affected by devastating fires, and give thanks for all the emergency personnel and caregivers.

For your many gifts, we give thanks, O God. We lift our unspoken concerns and joys to you in a moment of silence....

God of love and light, we know that each prayer we offer is held in your embrace, and we are grateful. We offer now the words that Jesus taught his disciples to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

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. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.

Hymn VU 82 A Light is Gleaming

A Blessing for Today

Let us go from this place to be the light of Christ.

May we carry the light of hope and love into the world, to share and to inspire. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Olds and Didsbury: MV 220 Hope Shines as the
Solitary Star

Sundre: May the Light of God Go With You

Postlude

Happy New Year, and thank you for participating in our worship service.

Olds and Knox (Didsbury) both host live worship each week, while the worship leadership alternates locations, and worship is live-streamed to the other church. You are welcome to attend either location at 9:30 am.

Sundre continues to have in- person worship at 1:30. All are welcome there, too! You can access the livestream at www.oldsunited.ca (click on the Livestream link).

The bulletin and sermon will continue to be posted to the websites, for those who are unable to join us. We also have a Facebook Page, Olds and Sundre United Churches.

Each week, via email, there will be updates and announcements. If you'd like to receive those emails, please contact one of the church offices and ask to be included.

Questions? Wish to financially support our ministries? To Contact us:

Olds United Church

4810 50th Street, Olds AB. T4H 1E4

email office@oldsunited.ca website www.oldsunited.ca 403-556-3052

Sundre United Church

Box 614 118 Centre Street North, Sundre AB. T0M 1X0

email sundreuc@telus.net website www.sundreunited.ca 403-638-4428

Knox United Church

P.O. Box 57 1406 - 19th Avenue Didsbury, AB, TOM OWO

email knoxdidsbury@shaw.ca website www.knoxunited.com 403-335-8373

Rev. Tammy's confidential email minister@oldsunited.ca