

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay – Liturgy

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

New Year's Day 2023

We Prepare for Worship

Prelude

Lighting of Christ Candle

Words of Welcome

We Worship God

Call to Worship

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise God in the heights!

Praise the Lord, sun and moon; give praise, all shining stars!

Give praise, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling God's command!

Give praise, hills and mountains.

All people together, let us praise the name of the Lord and declare God's glory in heaven and on earth.

Let us worship God!

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***Hymn**

As with gladness men of old

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mystery,

like the magi following the star, we come to you in wonder.

Your purposes are beyond our comprehension, your majesty incomparable and your love beyond imagination and your presence always with us.

We praise you for your steadfast love, and offer you our trust for the days ahead as we seek to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Christ, our newborn King.

God of light and life,

you have come to us in Christ Jesus to open a path to new life,

but we fall back on what is familiar.

We confess that we are in love with our old ways and

our resolution for change is all too short.

Forgive us when our resolve wavers

and shine your light on the way we can follow into your future.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.

Be assured of God's forgiveness.

Make a new start this year, be at peace with God,
secure in the knowledge of God's love.

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We Listen for God's Word

*Hymn

We three kings

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Prayer for Understanding

In the law and the prophets, you give us your will and in Jesus Christ you revealed your love. Open our minds by the power of your Spirit so that we might understand what you are saying to the church. Amen.

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Scripture Readings

❖ Ecclesiastes 3:1–15

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

²a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

⁹What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. ¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

❖ Matthew 2:1-12

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.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message In Our Own Time

New Year’s Day only occurs on a Sunday once every few years. It can be anywhere from 5 years to 11 years between occurrences. So it is not often in this particular congregation that we find ourselves sitting here together have just said goodbye to the year past and hello to the future that will be the year 2023.

For many, at this time of year, is the tradition of making a new year’s resolution. This can be helpful to some, for many others it can be the start of another path to failure. Change is difficult. Thankfully with God, and in our lives, new beginnings can happen any time, any day.

Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for everything. Though some of these things are happy and others seem rather sad, each of them has purpose and meaning. These pairs are not to be read as opposites but rather simply that each has a time.

Vs 2 We all are born and we all die. Birth and death are simply part of our lives. We all want to live lives of joy and abundance and it seems we desire to avoid death, yet

as Christians we understand death to mean that we finally get to go home to be at rest with God.

Vs. 2b There are seasons. We can't plant seeds during the winter or harvest them in the spring. Doing things when they are possible and makes sense is important, otherwise we can be fighting against nature or against ourselves. We may not be ready for certain things at a particular time in our lives. It may take time and preparation to find our way. We must also be aware of our own limitations, strengths, and gifts. We often say to children, "You can be and do anything you want to be and do." As we age, we find that may not always be the case. There can be limiting factors. This does not mean stop striving, but personal awareness is helpful.

Vs. 6b tells us a time to keep, and a time to throw away. There are times we need to save things carefully - like putting aside clothes to wear again. There are other times when we need to let things go - like giving away clothes we no longer wear for whatever the reason. We may have to save money, choosing not to spend it randomly in order to achieve educational goals or retirement goals, or just be able to buy an item that we will enjoy. Sometimes it is hard to know which time it is.

Vs. 7b There is a time to keep silent and a time to speak. Each one of us has fallen prey to speaking instead of keeping silent. Biting one's tongue, so to speak is harder for some of us than others. The number of times I stuck my foot in my mouth, in other words, spoken when I should have kept silent, are beyond counting at this point in my life. Thankfully with time, practice, and a little wisdom, I am getting better at this.

Vs 4 There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. Life can bring much grief and with it tears. Other times we laugh a lot, dance, and are filled with joy. God is with us in all of that. Even when the tears and laughter mingle together.

So there is a time for everything under the sun. Life bring with it challenges and joy, love and hate, war and peace. And though the scripture seems to make it appear straight forward, that there is a time for everything, such as planting and harvesting which have certain seasons, even that gets complicated, like when the soil is too wet for equipment and planting. The machines get plugged up with mud and the seed rots in the soil. Or in harvest time when the frost comes to soon and the harvest is threatened.

We see people hating others for no other reason than they are different. We witness the greed, fear, and hardship of war. Most of us born and raised in Canada have only seen war far afar. Others have lived it. It seems difficult that there could be a time for war. We always want peace. We pray for peace; we sing about peace on earth good will for all. And yet there is a time for war, some wars are unjust. Russia warring against the Ukraine is about power. The Ukrainians fighting against Russia are fighting for peace and life. War is complicated. Peace is complicated. Life is complicated.

So though the writer of Ecclesiastes simplifies the comparisons, we all know that life is not that straightforward. Things happen in their time, but it is not always good time or good timing.

Into all of this life stuff we interject the story of Christmas. A story that has its own season. Its own time. God comes to us in flesh and blood. We may be celebrating a new year today but for Christians, Christmas is not done with us yet. The wise men are just now getting to the manager. Actually, it was likely that the magi got to Mary, Joseph and Jesus about the time the boy was two years old, given that it was children two years old and younger that Herod ordered be killed – a story for another day.

We spend a lot of time on the star, the gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh. At times we get fixated on the three wise men, only to find that nowhere in the Bible does it say there were three. We try to find the symbolic meaning in all of that. What is overlooked and yet written about three times in this short story is that the wise men, however many there were, were determined to pay him homage. To pay Jesus homage. This story is about a journey. It could have played out as a great movie plot.

Writer and theologian Thomas Troeger writes, “Paying homage to Christ gives the story its purpose, its direction, and its culmination.”¹

We first hear the phrase in verse 2 when the wise men came from the east asking “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.”

The next occurrence of the phrase is in verse 8 where Herod sent the men 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.”

And finally in verse 11, when they get to the family, “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage.”

To pay homage in that time would have meant the physical act, the posture of prostrating oneself at the feet of a king. To prostrate oneself is to throw oneself facedown on the ground in reverence. This is a struggle for many of us. We are too proud. We don’t want to bow before anyone or anything. When we watch Muslim pray, this is their practice. For many Christians this is a hard thing to comprehend, to be so fully in awe and wonder of God to actually fall prostrate to the ground, and yet this is the action of wise men so long ago at the foot of a child who they understood had a greater meaning and purpose in life than any other. Their understood Jesus was a king before his own people knew it or acknowledged it.

If we were to follow in the footsteps of the wise men, these magi, we would begin our journey into the new year prostrate before God, metaphorically for sure, and maybe even

¹ Troeger, Thomas H. *Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P213.

physically. Giving ourselves fully, and completely to the one who is worthy of our praise and our lives.

We would notice and correct ourselves when we are not acting in the truth that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and king of our lives. Times when violence, fear, hate, or neglect take hold in us or around us. We would see how we or the world around us are acting like Herod and creating a world of chaos and pain rather than filling it with grace and love. We would be aware when our paying homage to our life of faith is just lip service and empty.

Finally, note that according to scripture the first thing the wise men did was kneel down and pay the boy, Jesus, homage. Their gifts waited. Only after acknowledging who Jesus was by paying homage to a king, did they give their gifts. Looking to Thomas Troeger again he writes, "The order of actions, homage first and gifts second, is significant... They express their relationship to Christ by kneeling and homage to him. First, homage. First, worship. First giving themselves utterly and completely to Christ. Then, offering their regal gifts."²

In this time of making plans, of thinking ahead into what 2023 will bring, could it be time, a season for paying homage to God, to Jesus, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? We spend a lot of time planning for our futures... dreaming about our future. Is it time to ask, where is God in all of our plans, our dreams, our hopes? In our own time, in our own lives, how do we live in a way that our faith journey pays homage to Christ the King?

At this time that seems hopeful with new beginnings, this start of a new year, how do we live our lives paying attention to where our lives have brought us and how God may be calling us to live our lives today. This is a journey not only for magi, but for all who want to pay homage to the Christ, the child, the man, the Messiah. This is our own time. We are the continuing story. May it be one that brings others to know that Jesus is King, a king worthy of homage, a king whose reign is one of grace, love, and life.

We Respond to God's Word

***Hymn**

Now greet the swiftly changing year

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Acknowledgment of the Offering

The Magi offered rare and expensive gifts to honour the new-born Christ child.

We may not bring gold, frankincense and myrrh, but all our gifts are used by God to build God's kingdom in the world.

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Doxology

Glory be to God our Maker

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Glory be to God our Maker, God Redeemer, holy Son;

² Ibid. P217.

glory be to God the Spirit, God almighty, Three-in-One!
Glory, glory, glory, glory, while eternal ages run.

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Prayer of Dedication

God of neighbourhoods and nations, we bring our gifts to you, grateful that you are with us in good times and hard times. We do not know what the year ahead will hold but your love shines like a star to guide us. Bless these gifts and bless us and use them and us in the service of your mission in the world. Amen.

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*Hymn

Glory to God

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Prayers of the People

God of all time and space,
you guided the magi on their ancient journey;
you watched over Jesus, Mary and Joseph when they fled as refugees;
and you walk with us into a year of many unknowns.

Thank you that we never take any journey without you.

We thank you for the year just past,
for walking through the good days and the hard days with us.

We give thanks for new possibilities emerging in ministry and mission;
give us courage to take them up with confidence.

Thank you for friendships within our congregation
which help us cope in ever changing times.

Open our eyes to what we have to share with others
as your Spirit guides us into the future

The year just ending has held sorrows and challenges for us too.

We remember dear ones of have died
and pray for those who look ahead in loneliness or sadness....

We pray for those who have faced challenges in health,
in their families or at work.....

Support each one who needs you close by.

God of light and love,

As we face the year ahead, we are aware that much around us is still uncertain.

We seek your strength and guidance in each challenge we will face.

Draw near to each one who must confront illness, loss or changing circumstances.

Guide leaders in communities and countries around the world

so that justice and peace may prevail in troubled places

and generous giving will bring hope to vulnerable lives.

God of community and commitment,

We pray for wisdom and courage in the year ahead.

Guide those for whom new opportunities appear and choices must be made.

Strengthen our congregation as we seek to witness to your love.
Make us faithful citizens who work together for the good of your whole creation.
Receive our humble prayers in the name of Jesus our Christ
who taught us to pray together:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

We are Sent out as God's People

***Hymn**

See amid the winter's snow

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Benediction

Go in courage and confidence to face the year ahead,
sure that the light of Christ will guide you.

And may God bless you and keep you;
may God's face shine upon you;
and may God be gracious to you
and give you joy and peace this day and every day,
now and evermore.

Postlude