

**JANUARY 3<sup>RD</sup>**  
**DIGITAL PRINT SERVICE: FIRST SACKVILLE PRESBYTERIAN**

**Call to Worship**

**Leader: What star is this, with beams so bright, more lovely than the noon day light?**

People: Tis sent to announce a new born king, glad tidings of our God to bring.

**Leader: Tis now fulfilled what God decreed, "From Jacob shall a star proceed."**

People: And lo! The eastern sages stand to read in heaven the Lord's command.

**Prayer of Adoration**

O Christ, you are the light of the world. Fill our minds with your peace and our hearts with your love. Here in our worship today, let your peace be upon us so our lives may be filled with your love. May your light shine through us to others, as we pray in your name. Amen.

*Hymn 172 As with gladness men of old*

**Prayer of Confession**

God of grace, the Magi were looking for Christ by the light of a star. We confess that we are easily turned aside. We are distracted by small issues, scared of change, and taken with the Herods of our time. When we forget what life is all about, O God, forgive us and shine your light in our lives. Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

L: Friends hear the Good News! God's goodwill overflows toward us in the Babe of Bethlehem.

**P: Through that child, who is our risen Lord, we ask forgiveness.**

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

**P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.**

*Hymn 173 We Three Kings*

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**“Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy, and love others as well as you love yourself.” Mark 12: 29-31**

## Mission Capsule – Frank and Joyce’s Fields

In Gwebe village in Malawi, Frank and his wife, Joyce, proudly look over their lush fields. For the past three years, Frank has been using conservation agriculture techniques that were taught to him by Presbyterian World Service & Development partners to help him harvest more. Conservation agriculture teaches farmers to protect and improve soil fertility, conserve water and make locally available resources into fertilizers. Over the years, Frank became a lead farmer in his village. His thriving fields are a reminder of how efficient conservation agriculture can be, setting an example as he teaches and empowers other farmers to use the same methods to increase their harvest.

## READINGS for January 3 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	REFLECTION
<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 60: 1-6	Arise, shine; for your light has come.
<i>Psalms</i>	Psalms 72: 1-7, 10-14	God’s anointed defends the poor.
<i>Epistle</i>	Ephesians 3:1-12	Boldness and confidence through faith.
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 2:1-12	The visit of the Magi.

*Hymn 177 Christ Whose Glory Fills the Sky*

### **SERMON: Beyond the Star**

The idea of rich male scholars from the east looking for the new born child named Jesus, did not originate with Matthew’s gospel. Matthew in all likelihood read and was quite familiar with the chapter we heard read this morning from Isaiah. The Isaiah reading was recited to Jews in Jerusalem about 600 years before Jesus was born.

The Jews were sent into exile. They lived in what is present day Iraq for a number of generations. When they returned to Jerusalem they found a city in ruins with little or no economy and even less hope. Into that situation the prophet speaks:

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

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The promise of God is to make Jerusalem both a place of peace and prosperity. The wise men who come from the east, like Matthew, were also aware of the story. They knew they were bringing gold, frankincense and myrrh to a new King. So when they got to Jerusalem they asked the question: “Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?”

They are assuming no doubt that the place they are looking for is in this vicinity. King Herod hears about the inquiries of the wise men and becomes scared, as do the religious leaders. A new King would not only be a threat to Herod but also to the religious establishment.

Herod arranges a meeting with the wise men to seek information on where the child is to be born. Their response indicated the birth was to be in Bethlehem. They say:

“In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘ 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.’”

This story of Epiphany is in many ways a story of two biblical texts. One is from Isaiah and the other from Micah. The first offers a vision of urban power and prosperity while the second offers a vision of simplicity, peace and security.

Two communities. Jerusalem with all its pretensions about the future and a little town called Bethlehem with nothing going for it but simple peace and security.

There is a story told about a Magi named Artaban, a friend of the three who made the trip to Bethlehem. Artaban had planned to go with the others but was delayed in following the unusual star that led to the city of Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem. As a result he did not get to see the child or his family, for the family, having heard that Herod was searching for them, fled to Egypt.

On his journey Artaban encountered countless needy people; some were widowed mothers and their children, others were blind beggars, and still others were simply poor. Artaban, moved by the plight of these people, used two of the three jewels he had brought for the new born king of the Jews to help these needy people.

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Artaban continued his search for almost thirty years, traveling each year with new hope. One year he arrived in Jerusalem. It was during the feast of Passover and the city was full of excitement. When Artaban asked someone what the excitement was about he was told that Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, was being crucified.

Artaban realized his search was over! He made his way through the crowds and soon heard the screams of a young girl, who was being sold into slavery; seeing the royal robes on Artaban, she pleaded for his help. He was so moved that he used his final jewel to buy her freedom. At that moment the sky grew dark and the earth shook and a great stone fell on Artaban. As he lay dying in the arms of the young girl he had rescued, he mourned the fact that he never realized his life long quest of finding and serving his King. He said, "Three and thirty years I looked for thee Lord, but I have never seen thy face or ministered to thee."

Then Artaban heard a voice saying, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of my brothers or sisters, you did it to me."

Artaban smiled, realizing he had found his King.

As he celebrated the feast of Epiphany, for what would be the last time of his life, Henri Nouwen reflected on its meaning with his family. He spoke of God being revealed in the weakness of the human condition in the birth of Jesus long ago, but also today, wherever people are sick, elderly, dependent and out of control. Nouwen said that we are called to offer our own weaknesses as a place to welcome God's appearance; this is possible only if we truly believe that we have been loved since before we were born, and will be loved after we have died.

According to Matthew the question here is, "Whose world is this?" "Does it belong to King Herod and all his counterfeit imitators?" "Or does it belong to King Jesus?" This is an either or question, not a both and. We can't have it both ways!

So let us look beyond the star and travel the way of Christ, the way of vulnerability, neighborliness and generosity. Amen.

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**Prayers:**

O God, we offer thanks for all you give to us in this life. We thank you for the past year, for walking with us through the hard and uncertain times, and for the gifts of encouragement and friendship that made us feel safe.

Hear us now, O God, as we leave a year that holds sorrow and pain for so many. We remember those who have died, and we pray for those who face this new year in loneliness or sadness.

We pray for those who face challenges in health. We remember those who are sensing an ending and need your peace and comfort in this time. God of light and love, as we face this year, we are aware that much around us is so uncertain. Draw close to any who confront illness, loss, or changing circumstances.

God of community and commitment, we pray for wisdom and courage in this time. Strengthen us as a congregation to continue to witness to your love for this world. Help us to reach out to our community in ways that show your love and service. Guide we pray our leaders to bring justice and peace to all, resources to meet health and hunger needs, and the will to share with the rest of this world in the name of Jesus, the Christ, who taught us to pray saying....

**Hymn 181**      *All praise to you, O Lord*

**COMMISSIONING/BENEDICTION**

Let us leave here as people of faith, living in the light. Let us leave here as those who follow where Jesus leads. Let us leave here as Spirit filled servants. Amen.

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