

January 4, 2026

Epiphany



Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church

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Pastor Kimberly Belken

December 28, 2025

1st Sunday of Christmas: Let Fear Fuel a Fire For Justice

Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church

Welcome & Announcements

Confession and Forgiveness

Friends, on this Epiphany Sunday we stand at the start of a new year, and there is nothing better about a new year than the chance to begin again. That is exactly what we do in the Prayer of Confession. We speak honestly with God and God surrounds us with grace. We are able to begin again. So may we start this new year, this new season, this new week with God's grace. Let us begin again.

Ever-loving God, we long for Christmas to usher in a season of peace and joy. However, we know that is not how the world works. Even just days after Christmas, we find ourselves face to face with fear once more.

So today we pray—

Forgive us when we allow fear to stop us in our tracks. Forgive us when our own fear prevents us from following your call. Forgive us when fear is louder than love.


Show us how to turn our fear into action. Show us how to live like the magi who searched for you in a fearful world. With hope we pray, Amen.

Family of faith, whether you are brave and courageous or fearful and timid, God's love for you knows no end. So join me in these words of forgiveness:

Whether fear inspires us to action, or stops us dead in our tracks, God's love for us is boundless. We are seen. We are surrounded with grace. We are sent to serve. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Gathering Song: We Three Kings WOV 646

We Three Kings of Orient Are



1 We three kings of O - ri - ent are; bear - ing
 2 Born a king on Beth - le - hem's plain, gold I
 3 Frank - in - cense to of - fer have I; in - cense
 4 Myrrh is mine; its bit - ter per - fume breathes a
 5 Glo - rious now be - hold him a - rise, King and



gifts we tra - verse a - far, field and foun - tain,
 bring to crown him a - gain; king for - ev - er,
 owns a de - i - ty nigh; prayer and prais - ing,
 life of gath - er - ing gloom; sor - rowing, sigh - ing,
 God and Sac - ri - fice; heav'n sings al - le -



moor and moun - tain, fol - low - ing yon - der star.
 ceas - ing nev - er, o - ver us all to reign.
 glad - ly rais - ing, wor - ship - ing God Most High.
 bleed - ing, dy - ing, sealed in the stone - cold tomb.
 lu - ia: al - le - lu - ia the earth re - plies.

Refrain



Oh, star of won - der, star of night, star with roy - al beau - ty bright;



west - ward lead - ing, still pro - ceed - ing, guide us to thy per - fect light!

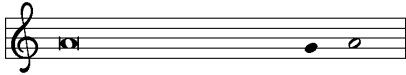
Text: John Henry Hopkins Jr., 1820–1891, alt.

Music: THREE KINGS OF ORIENT, John Henry Hopkins Jr., 1820–1891

Greeting

- P** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C** **And also with you.**

Kyrie



In peace, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For the peace from a-bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



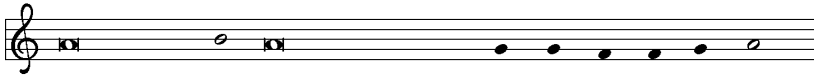
For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,



and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.



For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor-ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord. Lord have mer - cy.



Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra-cious Lord. A - men.

Canticle of Praise

Refrain

Assisting minister



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia.

All



1 Wor- thy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us



free to be peo-ple of God. Pow - er and rich - es and wis - dom and



strength, and hon - or and bless-ing and glo - ry are his.

Refrain



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia.



2 Sing with all the peo - ple of God and join in the



hymn of all cre - a - tion: Bless - ing and hon - or and glo - ry and



might be to God and the Lamb for - ev - er. A - men.

Final refrain



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God, for the Lamb who was slain



has be - gun his reign. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

Prayer of the Day

God of the stars,

Like the magi, we come to this place searching for you. So today, just like every day, we ask that you would remove any barricades that keep us from your Spirit. Clear out the distractions. Wipe away the doubt. Open up our hearts, and speak to us through these ancient words. And as you do, we will keep walking, we will move toward you. With hope we pray, Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

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 in their nurses' arms.

⁵Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,^[a]
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.

L: The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.

**² May he judge your people with righteousness
and your poor with justice.**

³ May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.

**⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.**

⁵ May he live while the sun endures
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

**⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.**

⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

**¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute;
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.**

¹¹ May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

**¹² For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.**

¹³ He has pity on the weak and the needy
and saves the lives of the needy.

**¹⁴ From oppression and violence he redeems their life,
and precious is their blood in his sight.**

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I, Paul, am a prisoner for^[a] Christ Jesus^[b] for the sake of you gentiles, ²for surely^[c] you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,^[d] ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery^[e] was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ ⁹and to make everyone see^[f] what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in^[g] God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.^[h] ¹¹This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have access in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

L: The Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation



Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18

P The holy gospel according to Matthew

C Glory to you, O Lord.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi^[a] from the east came to Jerusalem,² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east^[a] and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[a] was to be born. ⁵ They 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^[a] my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi^[a] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then 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." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,^[a] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[a] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi,^[a] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.^[b] **17** Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

P The Gospel of the Lord
C **Praise to you O, Christ.**

Children’s Sermon

Sermon

Hymn of the Day: We’ve Seen God’s Face

We've Seen God's Face

W ŻŁOBIE LEŻY 8.7.8.7.8.8.7.7

Words by Anna Strickland, 2025

Traditional Polish melody



Like the ma - gi from the east we tra - vel in - to
If we find our path has led us to King Her - od's
We will trust that star to guide us to the place where
When new threats de - rail our jour - ney from the path we



the un - known Step by step we make the jour - ney, called by
den of fear Still we'll keep our fo - cus fixed on chas - ing
we were called Find - ing God em - bod - ied in the humb - lest
planned to take We won't let fear par - a - lyze us, no we



God to seek the throne O - ver moun - tains, through the des - erts
down that star so clear Though the ty - rants rage and threat - en
dwell - ing place of all As King Her - od sends his sol - diers
won't stay locked in place Stay - ing nim - ble, we'll move for - ward



Seek - ing Christ we fol - low e - ver 'Til at last
Noth - ing weak - ens our pro - fess - ion It is God's
Time stands still while we be - hold him Here's where we
Keep - ing safe by cross - ing bor - ders Move a - round



we reach the place Where we hope to see God's face
voice we have heard Fear will not have the last word
were called to be God's in - car - nate love to see
the fear with grace For we know we've seen God's face

Affirmation of Faith

We have seen the valley. We have seen a sky without stars. We have seen the longest night, and still we believe.

We believe in a with-us God. We believe in the hope of tomorrow. We believe that good news is louder than fear. We believe this good news is for all people.

So even when our knees shake, even when our voice trembles, even when fear is all around us, we will hold onto that good news.

We will reach for each other. We will look for God in our midst. We will sing songs of joy. We will proclaim: unto us, love is born.

We have seen the longest night, and we have seen unimaginable love. So still, we believe. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Receiving of Star Words

It is a prayer practice in churches all over the world to give people a star word on Epiphany Sunday. There are many reasons behind this tradition. First, we know that the magi followed a star, which ultimately led them to Jesus. Therefore, we too use all the resources we have available to us—including creative prayer practices and intention words for the new year—to move closer to Jesus.

Secondly, we trust that God uses multiple ways to guide us and speak to us. Star words offer a tool to actively seek and reflect on God's presence among us, both in the moment and in hindsight.

Finally, we know that the most common prayer practice for many involves speaking to God as opposed to silence or contemplation. However, this practice invites a new prayer rhythm of reflection and review that can be a powerful way to connect with God.

So in just a moment, you will be invited to select a star word. Consider this a guiding word for the year ahead. We invite you to remember your star word often, seeking the ways God might be moving through the meanings and definitions the word contains. However, as we prepare our hearts and minds for this centering moment, let us pray....

Beckoning God, from every corner we have come looking for you. A thousand monsters reared their heads along the way, threatening to derail us. But we are here nonetheless. We have gone over, around, under, and through our fear.

And when we have faced fears we couldn't evade, we took that fear by the hand and dragged it along with us on the journey because we will stop at nothing to follow you.

Your star calls us forward, ever forward, toward our convictions, toward our dreams, toward a world that reflects your justice, peace, and love, toward our belonging in the great family of creation. Your star calls us forward, and the gifts that await are too great to hand over to fear.

May we find courage and strength for the journey in these star words we are about to receive. When fear threatens to stop us, may we hold onto to these words and remember what lies ahead. When the journey is challenging, lift our heads to see our companions on the journey and the shining star that lights the way. You go with us, and if you are with us, what shall we fear?

Beckoning God, we follow you into the unknown, with heads held high or knees quaking in fear. When the way ahead is unsure, we return to what we know. You are Immanuel, God-With-Us.

Our ushers will pass baskets through the congregation. We invite you to draw out a star word, without looking at it first, and then pass the basket to your neighbor. May Christ's light guide you.

(passing of baskets—background music while this happens)

Holy God,

You always show up, even in our fear, even in times of uncertainty, even when we can't seem to take the next step, you are with us. You are behind us, before us, and beside us, hemming us in with your love.

As we sit with these star words, open our hearts to the wisdom they hold. Keep our minds nimble and flexible, awake to the constellation of meanings we may find in a single word. May they challenge us, comfort us, and call us forward.

Let these words be a reminder of your presence with us. May they give us courage and guidance for the year ahead. Let them shine in the dark, pointing us toward you. And at the end of this year, may we look back at the paths we took and see how in every moment, you journeyed with us. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

Offering

Offering: *Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful* (ELW 184)

Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of

bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that

we may be fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of

all; u-nite them with the prayers we of-fer. Grace our ta-ble

with your pres-ence, and give us a fore-taste of the feast to come.

Offering Prayer

- P God of glory,
- C **great are your wonders among us and many are the blessings you bestow. Use us and these your gifts for the needs of the world, that all the ends of the earth may rejoice in your saving grace, through Christ our Savior. Amen.**

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Friends, did you ever have a moment growing up when you walked into the school cafeteria, panned the faces in the crowd, and wondered if you were going to have a place to sit?

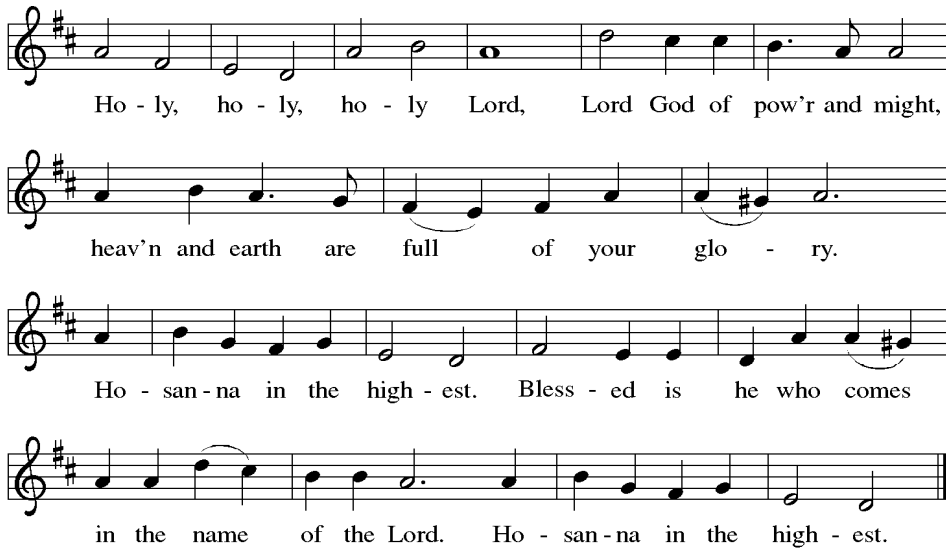
Did you ever have a moment, maybe as a new student or new employee, when fear nibbled at the back of your mind because you weren't sure where you belonged?

I imagine, at some point or another, most of us have experienced that kind of fear. But here at this table, you never have to wonder.

Here at this table, there is enough room, enough food, enough love for everyone.

Here at this table, Jesus is standing up on his chair, waving his hands over his head, saying to each of you "I saved you a seat!" Here at this table, you are wanted and welcomed. You are safe and loved. Here at this table, you belong. There is no need for fear here, for this is a joyful feast.

Holy, Holy, Holy



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might,
heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.
Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

Thanksgiving at the Table

P In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Lord's Prayer

P Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us,

C 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; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

P Here is life. God is with us. Come, receive what God has promised.

Holy Communion

Communion Song:

Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on

us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have

mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the

sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

Post Communion Blessing

P May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C Amen.

Prayer after Communion

P Loving God,

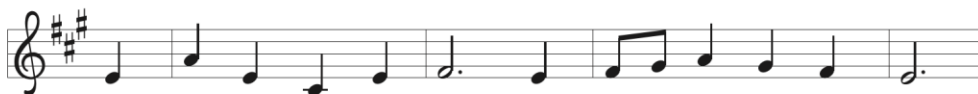
C in a world racked with fear, you gather us together. You set the table. You meet us here. You nourish our bodies as you nourish our spirits. You remind us that this is a joyful feast, and that fear cannot win every time. So, with renewed courage, with renewed hope, with renewed conviction, send us out into the world. Help us to feed others as you have fed us. With gratitude we pray, Amen.

Blessing

P In a fearful world, may you look for God's spirit. May you reach for each other's hands. May you choose courage whenever you can. And in all things, may you remember that good news is louder than fear. In the name of the one who calls, the one who sends, and the one who journeys with—go in peace and be not afraid. **Amen.**

Sending Song: Arise Your Light Has Come, ELW 314

Arise, Your Light Has Come!



- 1 A - rise, your light has come! The Spir - it's call o - bey;
2 A - rise, your light has come! Fling wide the pris - on door;
3 A - rise, your light has come! All you in sor - row born,
4 A - rise, your light has come! The moun - tains burst in song!



show forth the glo - ry of your God which shines on you to - day.
pro - claim the cap - tive's lib - er - ty, good tid - ings to the poor.
bind up the bro - ken - heart - ed ones and com - fort those who mourn.
Rise up like ea - gles on the wing, God's pow'r will make us strong.

Text: Ruth Duck, b. 1947

Music: FESTAL SONG, William H. Walter, 1825–1893

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Dismissal

P Glory to God in the highest!

C And peace to God's people on earth!

P Go in joy. Embody God's redeeming grace. Persist in hope.

C Thanks be to God

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Announcements

- **Annual Meeting:** The annual meeting of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church will take place during worship on Sunday, Jan. 18. If we have to cancel church due to weather, we will hold the meeting the following Sunday, Jan. 25.
- **Office Hours:** Pastor Kimberly will be out of the office January 5-12. Please contact Randy Reuter if you need assistance.

