

WELCOME TO THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS

Sunday Morning Worship

January 5, 2025 at 10:30 AM

EPIPHANY SUNDAY



FIELD NOTES

With tears in your eyes,
you name all the bumps
and zigzags your life has taken.

With clenched teeth
and a hummingbird pulse,
you wake up

and wonder—how did I get here?

In the last 40 days of
desert wandering, you say
you haven't heard God's voice once.

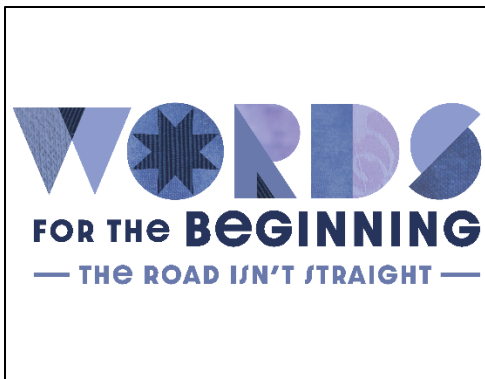
You say you miss when God was close,
when God used to sing the harmony line.

So you yell at the sky,
begging God to drop a pin,
to name the road,
to draw you a map.

You lament the way this life isn't easy.
You ask me—was the road ever straight
and narrow,
or was that all a lie?

But then you crest the mountain,
and I don't hear from you for a while,
because God was growing
in the lilac field
on the other side of the hill.

God was scattered
among the pebbles
of the road you never planned to take.
Isn't it amazing, you say,
there are a million roads home
and God walks every single one of them.



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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS
Sunday Morning Worship
January 5, 2025 at 10:30 AM**

EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Joys and Concerns

Welcome and Announcements

(Facebook Live)

GATHERINGⁱ

PRELUDE

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

Anthony Giamanco
by Richard Storrs Willis

*** CALL TO WORSHIP**

How did you get here?

Pulpit side of the room: I walked, eyes looking up, following the star.

Organ side of the room: I ran, lunging for a love that is bigger than me.

Pulpit side of the room: I tumbled and fell, tender step after tender step.

Organ side of the room: I ambled like a river, caught up in God's flow.

I crawled, kissing the earth below me.

Tell me again. How did you get here?

I am here by God's grace and love's pull.

Welcome home.

This is God's house.

There is room for you here.

Let us worship our gracious God.

*** OPENING HYMN**

Arise, Your Light Is Come!

GTG #744

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 brokenhearted 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.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Call to Confession

Friends, one of the gifts of confession is it allows us to begin again.

For in this moment of prayer,

we name our shortcomings and mistakes.

We receive God's grace, and we start again.

The slate is wiped clean.

The prayer of confession is an act of beginning again and again and again.

So join me in prayer. For even here, God is already doing something new.

Let us begin again. Let us pray:

Prayer of Confession:

God of new beginnings,

We admit that we often follow the well-worn path,
simply because others have been there before.

Sometimes this is holy and humble,
but there are days when a new path needs to be tread.

On those new-beginning days, O God,
give us the courage to follow your star.

Give us the courage to go home by another way.

Give us the courage to kick up some dust and walk in a new direction
for the sake of justice, love, and neighbor.

For when you are doing a new thing, we want to have the courage to follow.

With hope in our hearts we wander, we travel.

Amen.

Moment of Silence for Personal Confession

Assurance of Pardon

Dear travelers,

No matter the roads you've taken,
the steps you've made,
or the paths you've traveled,
there is nowhere you could go
that would land you outside of God's love.

Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel:

Regardless of the path we travel,

of how lost we may get,

or the twists and turns along the way,

we do not walk alone.

We are loved.

We are forgiven.

We have every chance to begin again.

Thanks be to God for a love like that!

Passing of the Peace * *When directed, share a word or sign of peace with those near you.*

May the peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

* ***Glory be to the Father*** *Gloria Patri*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;

***As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen. Amen.***

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of starlight,

God of new beginnings,

We are so grateful.

We are so grateful to be here, at the start of a new year, fresh off the press.

We are so grateful to be here, at the start of a new week, gathered in community.

We are so grateful to begin again.

So here at this beginning, we bring you our prayers.

Holy God, for the people who stand at a crossroad, unsure of what decision to make—give them clarity.

For those who are weary and worn down by the switchbacks of life,
for those walking with blisters,

for those desperate to find their way home—provide them comfort.
For those who feel confined by paths that are too straight and narrow—guide them to wide open spaces. Show them your glory in the new path, the untamed path, the twists and the turns.
For those who walk alone—surround them with community.
For those who walk afraid—grant them protection.
For those who want to walk home, but have found that home is no longer there—destroyed by war or disaster, deemed unsafe by our own human hands—may we see them. May we know their struggles and may we respond with compassion.
For those who stand out under the night sky, desperate to see a sign of your star—shine brightly.
And for those who dance their way down the path, delighted by the beauty the journey brings—bless them. Allow their joy to spill over into our lives, inspiring gratitude and joy in each of us.
Guiding God, we know that this life of faith is not easy.
Even the Magi, those faithful seekers, had to change course.
Even the Magi had to go home by another way.
So as we journey, bless our wanderings.
Bless our path.
Walk beside us.
Dance beside us.
Hang stars in the sky
and place a deep knowing in our gut that we simply cannot ignore.
And if the road turns into a dead end, grant us the courage to begin again.
With hope in our hearts and gratitude in our lungs,
we unite our voices together, saying. . .

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; forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN: *The First Nowell*

1 The first Nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
born is the King of Israel.

2 They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night. [Refrain]

3 And by the light of that same star
three wise men came from country far;
to seek for a king was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went. [Refrain]

GTG #147

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest;
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
and there it did both stop and stay,
right over the place where Jesus lay. [Refrain]

5 Then entered in those wise men three,
full reverently upon their knee,
and offered there in his presence
their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense. [Refrain]

6 Then let us all with one accord
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,
and with his blood our life hath bought. [Refrain]

THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of starlight,
We long to follow you.
Like the Magi,

we want to pick up the hems of our robes
and run in your direction.
Like the Magi,

we want to kick up dust with our feet
and make a joyful ruckus
following your guiding star.
Unfortunately, the stars can be
hard to see from here.
Your still, small voice can be
hard to hear from here.

So just as you guided the Magi, guide us.
Draw our attention to your Word.
Reveal what it is you want us to hear today,
so that we can follow you.
With hope in our hearts we pray,
Amen.

SERMON

Words for the Beginning: The Road Isn't Straight

Pastor Denise Stone

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 2:1-12

Pew Bible, NT, pg. 2

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men 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 at its rising, 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 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 my people Israel.' "

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men 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 at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, 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.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 43:16-21

Pew Bible, OT, pp. 672-673

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸ Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
²⁰ The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

RESPONSE

HYMN: *We Three Kings of Orient Are*

GTG #151

1 We three kings of Orient are;
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright,
westward leading, still proceeding,

guide us to thy perfect light!

2 Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown him again,
King forever, ceasing never
over us all to reign. [Refrain]

3 Frankincense to offer have I;
incense owns a deity nigh;

prayer and praising gladly raising,
worshiping God Most High. [Refrain]

4 Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in a with-us God,
a God who is beside us in the mountains and valleys,
holding our hand through every bump and turn.
And in the chaos of our journey,
we believe that God sees what we cannot always see:
a path home by another way.
Therefore, trusting in this ever-present and guiding God,
we lace up our shoes.
We look for God's fingerprints in the world.
We trust that there are paths still unexplored,
paths that God has only begun to invite us down.
And like the Magi, we dare to follow.
May it be so, Amen.**

sealed in the stone-cold tomb. [Refrain]

5 Glorious now behold him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
sounds through the earth and skies. [Refrain]

SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

With joyful and radiant hearts,
we gratefully give who we are
and what we have to God. ⁱⁱ

A Moment of Silence – Offertory

*** Doxology**

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Offering Prayer

God Most High, receive the gifts of our lives
as an offering of gratitude for your grace.
Overshadow us with your Holy Spirit
and let it be with us according to your word,
for nothing is impossible with you. Amen.

*Luke 1:35–38; 1 Corinthians 1:4*ⁱⁱⁱ

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

By the light of the star,
God led travelers to the Christ child.
When they saw the child
they were overwhelmed with joy.
By the light of divine love,
God leads us to this holy meal.
Gathered together,
we encounter the living Christ
and taste the deepest joy.^{iv}
All are welcome to this table,
for it is the table of Jesus Christ.

THE GREAT PRAYER OF 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.**

Loving God,

We come to this Table today longing for a new beginning.

In a world that so often feels like it's ending,

we crave the hope of a new beginning.

We long to heal from the endings and crash landings of our hurting world and start again,
rooted in your good news.

So week by week, bit by bit, we return to your Word.

Week by week, bit by bit, we return to each other.

Week by week, and bit by bit, we repeat the truths that we so often need to hear, trusting that
by your grace, it is never too late to start again.

So in this spirit of beginnings, we come to your Table.

Once more we ask that you would meet us here.

Pour out your Spirit on this ordinary meal, that in this bread and cup we may glimpse a new day.

May the sight of everyone being welcomed at this Table

remind us that all are loved by you.

May the evidence that there is food for all

remind us that no one is meant to go hungry.

May the fact that our own sin, shame, and doubt do not keep us from this Table remind us
that you welcome and love us as we are.

And may all of these Communion truths serve as building blocks for a new day, for a new
beginning.

With hope in our hearts, we pray.

With hope in our hearts, we gather.

With hope in our hearts, we begin again.

Meet us here.

Allow this joyful feast to be the start of something new.

Words of Institution

On the night in which he gave himself for us

Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

"Take and eat; this is my body."

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup,

blessed it with thanks and gave it to them, saying,

"Drink of this, all of you. This is my blood,

poured out for you and for many, in a new Covenant,

which is the forgiveness of sin."

As long as we break this bread and share this cup

we remember his death and resurrection, until he comes again.

Communion

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Please come forward to receive the elements by intinction. Those unable to come forward will be served in their place. The Communion cup contains only non-alcoholic grape juice. Gluten-free items are located on the plate with the bread.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Nourishing God,
Sometimes we tell ourselves that too much has taken place to begin again.
We think the world is too far gone.
We think we have made too many mistakes.
We tell ourselves that we couldn't possibly begin again.
But then we come to this Table and we get a glimpse of your kingdom.
We come to this Table and all are welcomed, all are seen, all are fed.
And just like that, we have hope.
Just like that, we begin again.
Thank you for the gift of this fresh start.
Thank you for planting hope deep in our bones.
Thank you for meeting us in ordinary bread and juice to remind us that it's never too late to build your kingdom here.
We are grateful.
We are so grateful.
Amen.

*** CLOSING HYMN:** *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (Jesus, the Light of the World)*

GTG #127, v. 1

Hark! the herald angels sing,
Jesus, the light of the world.
Glory to the newborn King,
Jesus, the light of the world.

We'll walk in the light, beautiful light.
Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.
O, shine all around us by day and by night.
Jesus, the light of the world.

* BENEDICTION

As you leave this place,
may you have the wisdom to lean on one other.
May you have the courage to hold onto hope,
the compassion to do the good that is yours to do,
and the confidence to trust that God sees you as a blessing.
For in a world full of dead ends,
Advent invites us to begin again.
So start here.
Start now.
Start with love and begin again.
In the name of Christ, our new beginning, go in peace.

POSTLUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTES FOR SHARING OF JOYS AND CONCERNS

Please fill out a Prayer Concern card prior to the service and hand to Pastor Denise Stone or an Usher.

These are available at the back of the Sanctuary.

You may also email Pastor Denise at pastordenisestone@gmail.com.

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE JANUARY 12, 2025

Annual Reports (if you normally do them) are due to Pastor Denise by January 12th so they can be compiled in time for our Annual Meeting on January 26, 2025.

CALENDAR

Sunday, Jan. 5	Worship (Communion)	10:30 a.m.
	Coffee Hour	11:30 a.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 7	Food Pantry	10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Serving guests from 12 to 2 p.m.)
	Scouts	6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Sunday, Jan. 12	Worship	10:30 a.m.
	Coffee Hour	11:30 a.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 14	Food Pantry	10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Serving guests from 12 to 2 p.m.)
	Scouts	6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Sunday Jan. 26	Annual Meeting	Following the Morning Worship Service.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BIG FLATS, NEW YORK

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Arise, Your Light Is Come!

Author: Ruth C. Duck (1974)

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Tune Information Title: FESTAL SONG

Composer: William H. Walter (1894)

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Gloria Patri

Tune Information

Title: GLORIA PATRI (Greatorex)

Composer: H. W. Greatorex (1851)

Copyright: Public Domain

The First Nowel the Angel Did Say

Author: Anonymous (1833)

Copyright: Public Domain

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Author: John H. Hopkins (1857)

Copyright: Public Domain

Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Author: Thomas Ken (1674)

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Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Jesus, the Light of the World

Author (stanzas): Charles Wesley

Author (refrain): George D. Elderkin

Tune Information Title: WE'LL WALK IN THE LIGHT

Composer (attributed to): Geo. D. Elderkin (1880)

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ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, *Adapted from Liturgy and Prayers by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.*

ⁱⁱ <https://calltoworshipjournal.org/january-6-2025-epiphany-of-the-lord/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://calltoworshipjournal.org/january-6-2025-epiphany-of-the-lord/>.

^{iv} <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/3475/worship-elements-epiphany-sunday-option-1>.