



*An Open and Affirming Congregation
of the United Church of Christ*



Order of Worship for January 4, 2026 10:30 am

Welcome to Worship at Center Church!
We are delighted that you are with us today.



Epiphany | What do you fear?
FEAR DOESN'T STOP US

Choices to Make

There was a funeral in Charleston,¹²
a funeral for nine people killed by one gun.
There was a funeral in Charleston because the world is a scary place.
A violent place, a place full of Herods with pistols and broken agendas.
People could have stayed home. They could have locked their doors,
closed the curtains, buried themselves the way fear invites us to do.
We would have understood.

But instead, people came to the funeral.
They unearthed their hearts.
They carried the tenderest parts of themselves out into the world
where the sun could reach them, along with their fear.
They crowded the pews with black hats and mourning cries.
They sang "Amazing Grace" when the worst had happened.

In a world full of fear, we have choices to make—
bury ourselves and close the curtains,
or fill the church and choose to sing.

I'm not saying it'll be easy,
but if you want to carry the tenderest part of yourself out into the world,
I'll begin to sing.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

¹² This poem was inspired by President Barack Obama's decision to sing "Amazing Grace" following the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17th, 2015.

FIRST SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY – WHAT DO YOU FEAR?

FEAR DOESN'T STOP US

COMMUNION SUNDAY

Cover Art: 'King Tingz' by Nic Faison

**Please rise in body or spirit.*

CHIMES

ORGAN PRELUDE Greensleeves

R. Vaugh-Williams

CHORAL INTROIT Lo, How a Rose 'ere Blooming

M. Praetorius

Warburton Music Interns

WELCOME & LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT*†

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: In the dark of morning,

All: the stars still shine.

In the depth of winter,

the birds still climb.

At the start of the year,

tender and new,

God is here.

God is near.

Do not rest in your fear.

God is here.

So like the stars and the birds,

Let us worship holy God.

*OPENING CAROL (*insert, next page*) We Three Kings

KINGS OF ORIENT

The congregation is invited to sing along to verses 1&5;

Emily Gillespie, Ian Duncan and Mica Guzman, soloists, verses 2, 3, & 4

We Three Kings of Orient Are

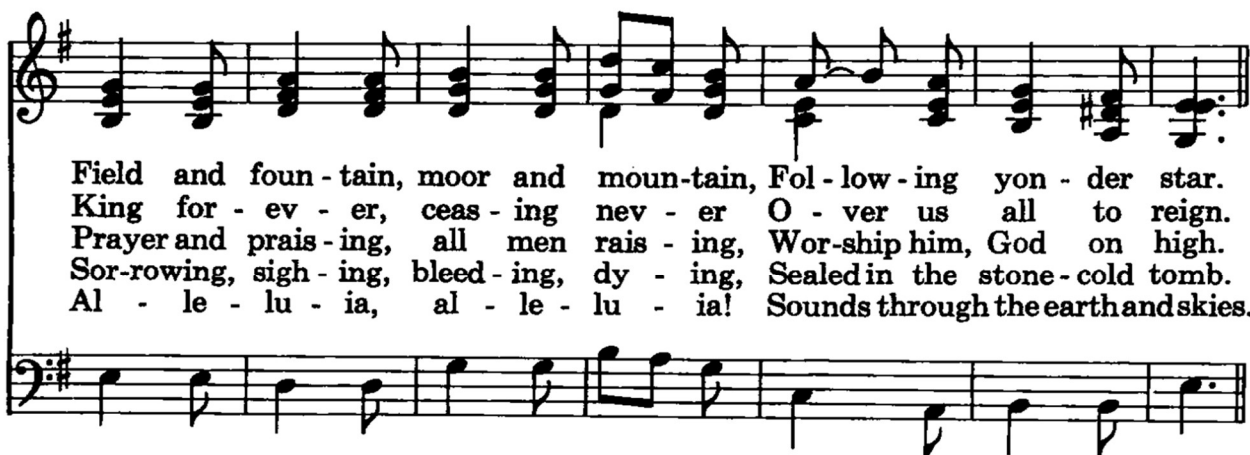
John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1820-1891, alt.

KINGS OF ORIENT 8.8.8.6. with Refrain

John H. Hopkins, Jr., 1820-1891

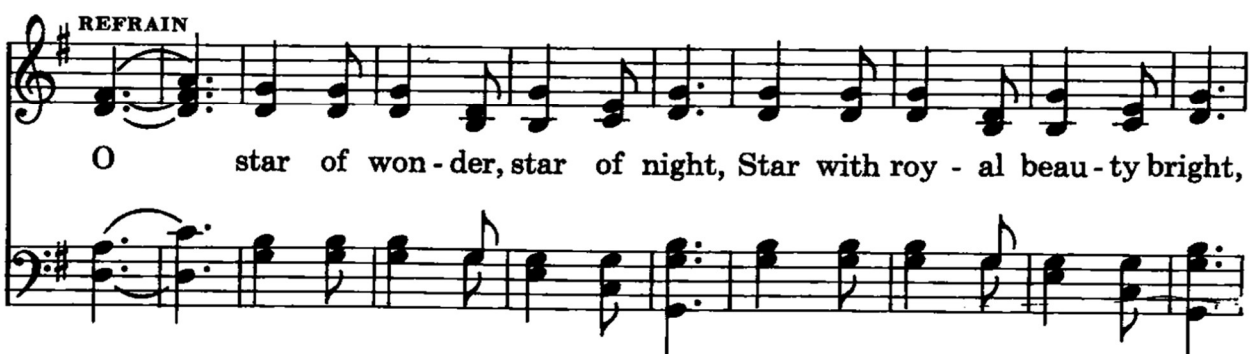
In unison


1 We three kings of O-ri-ent are, Bear-ing gifts we trav-erse a - far
 2 Born a king on Beth-le-hem's plain, Gold I bring to crown him a - gain,
 3 Frank-in-cense to of-fer have I, In - cense owns a de-i - ty nigh;
 4 Myrrh is mine; its bit-ter per-fume Breathes a life of gath-er-ing gloom;
 5 Glo-rious now be - hold him a - rise, King and God and Sac - ri - fice;

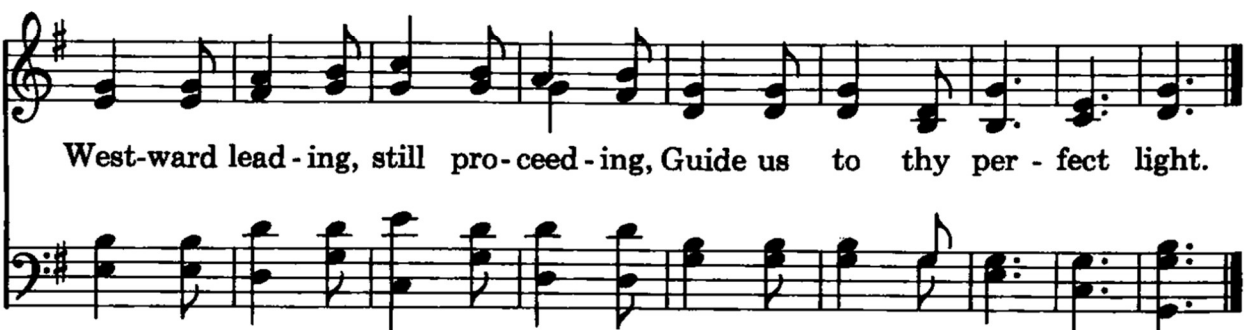


Field and foun-tain, moor and moun-tain, Fol-low-ing yon-der star.
 King for - ev - er, ceas-ing nev - er O - ver us all to reign.
 Prayer and prais-ing, all men rais-ing, Wor-ship him, God on high.
 Sor-rowing, sigh-ing, bleed-ing, dy-ing, Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.
 Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia! Sounds through the earth and skies.

REFRAIN



O 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.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

A TIME FOR CHILDREN

The congregation sings as the children head to their classrooms.

***Go, Tell it on the Mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere!
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born!***

African American Spiritual

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

*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.
As you do,
we will move toward you.
With hope we pray,
amen.*

SCRIPTURE Matthew 2: 1-12, 16-18

SERMON “Looking Up”

Rev. Deb Moyer

*HYMN (insert, next page) We’ve Seen Your Face
To the tune of ‘Infant Holy, Infant Lowly’

W ŻŁOBIE LEŻY

Words by Anna Strickland, 2025

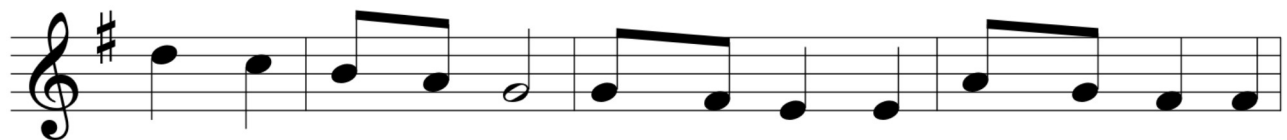
Traditional Polish melody



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

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (*Unison*)

**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 again.
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.**

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

One: 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:

All: 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.

SUNG RESPONSE NCH 126 v. 4

*Saints, before the altar bending,
watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly, your prayers attending,
Christ beside you shall appear.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, give thanks and sing.*

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Invitation to the Table

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving & The Lord's Prayer

Sharing of the Elements & Star Word Ritual

Today, we invite you to come to the table to receive Holy Communion along with a star word to guide you in seeking God this year.

After receiving Bread and Cup, proceed to the communion table and led by the Holy Spirit, choose your word for the coming year.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION (*Unison*)

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.

CALL TO OFFERING

OFFERTORY He Shall Feed His Flock

G. F. Handel

Mica Guzman, Alto

*DOXOLOGY NCH 135 (*refrain*)

*O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!*

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

*CLOSING CAROL NCH 139 The First Nowell (vs. 3-5)

THE FIRST NOWELL

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BENEDICTION

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.

CHORAL BENEDICTION

ORGAN POSTLUDE Noël

L. C. Dacquin

Thank you to everyone who participated in today's worship!

Epiphany | What do you fear? FEAR DOESN'T STOP US

Read Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18

Reflection | Nic Falson

For years, there has been a nasty practice of shaming indigenous practices, such as the usage of sage, or the spiritual use of herbs, metals, and the stars, while high church settings actively use incense in worship. For years, I have been reminding people that Jesus was gifted gold, frankincense, and myrrh by people who followed the stars to find him. That is the heart of my piece, *King Tingz*. I wanted to emphasize the sky and the importance of the stars, a reminder that this was essential to their witness.

Of the magi, the one bowing is marked with the flower of frankincense on their robe. On their left shoulder is a map of modern Persia, reminding us of their journey back home having to take a new route. They are crowned with cornrows and covered with more greenery because of their position to the ground. While we celebrate the stars, I wanted there to be some grounding to the earth. As Jesus is both divine and human, he holds space in both worlds.

The one to the right has soft myrrh flowers on her elbow and collar. Her outer arm is holding an infant, not Jesus, while her sleeve holds the Palestinian flag with the Arabic word *Nakba*,¹⁶ reminding us of the genocide of 1947. She is weeping for the children that Herod commits to murdering because of their defiance. Her golden crown is surrounded by a blue bandana, a quiet nod to Chola culture found on the West Coast, as Latino Christians have always emphasized the importance of *los reyes*.¹⁷

The one to the left is plated in gold. He looks up to the sky, more concerned about navigation, as he is the guiding force for the three of them. I gave this king a durag after some research on Persian magi showed me variations of headwear or turbans that emulated that of a durag.

Above all, if there is something I have learned from living in a Hispanic community and attending a Spanish-speaking church, it is that BIPOC¹⁸ communities do not play about *los reyes*. I wanted aspects of my culture and other American subcultures to be able to see bits and pieces of themselves in this art. But to also see our connection to the stars and the earth alike.

Prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

¹⁶ Meaning "the catastrophe," this refers to the events of the 1948 Palestine war in which Palestinian Arabs were ethnically cleansed and displaced from their homes. These events continue to shape the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict.

¹⁷ Meaning "the kings."

¹⁸ This is an acronym for "Black, Indigenous, People of Color."