

Order of Worship (The Epiphany of our Lord) for January 4, 2026

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

C: and also with you.

P: Christmas and New Years are over in our society. It is on now to the hard grind of winter.

C: Shoveling snow, tightrope walking on ice, dreary days, cold nights, flus and coughs. The celebration seems over.

P: We forget about the joy of Christmas because we see Christmas too often a time of tinsel, “warm fuzzies”, and presents under the tree.

C: The message of Christmas, that God sent His Son into our world to give us peace, seems so often forgotten.

P: Instead, we live in fear.

C: Fear of the economy. Fear of losing what we have—jobs, financial security, health, comforts.

P: That fear above us keeps us from sharing the true message of Christmas with others.

C: Instead, we live for ourselves. We live in sin.

All: Forgive us Lord.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:1–12

P: Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.’” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.” After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

P: God's light, His Son, Christ Jesus continues to shine in this world. We begin a new season of Epiphany, a time to remember that Jesus has truly shown Himself to be the Son of God and our Savior. In His name and by His authority, I forgive you all your sins.

C: Amen.

Opening Hymn: “As With Gladness Men of Old” – Hymn #397

Entrance Psalm

P: I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations;

C: therefore nations will praise You forever and ever.

P: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;

C: You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

P: Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness beyond Your companions;

C: Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations;

C: therefore nations will praise You forever and ever.

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day

P: Let us pray. O God, by the leading of a star You made known Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles. Lead us, who know You by faith, to enjoy in heaven the fullness of Your divine presence; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 60:1–6

R: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A 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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 3:1–12

P: For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Sermon Hymn: *“O Christ, Our True and Only Light”* - Hymn # 839

Sermon: *“Nations Shall Come To Your Light”* – Isaiah 60:1-6

One of the most iconic films to take place in the state of Iowa is Field of Dreams. It’s the story of a farmer who builds a baseball field in a cornfield to follow a voice only he can hear, a voice that keeps repeating the line, “If you build it, they will come.” And the film ends with a line of cars coming to see the field of dreams, to see what has been built.

Why do they come? James Earl Jones’ character, a reclusive author who has been brought out of his isolation because of this quest, sums it up in his iconic speech.

“Ray, people will come, Ray. They’ll come to Iowa for reasons they can’t even fathom. They’ll turn up your driveway, not knowing for sure why they’re doing it. They’ll arrive at your door as innocent as children, longing for the past. “Of course, we won’t mind if you look around,” you’ll say. “It’s only twenty dollars per person.” They’ll pass over the money without even thinking about it. For it is money they have and peace they lack. ... This field, this game -- it’s a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that once was good, and it could be again.”

That’s the promise that we find in the Isaiah reading today. Active before the exile but looking ahead to their return from exile, Isaiah tells the people to look not just to their past, but to their future with the words, “And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Isaiah reminds his hearers of all that once was good, and it could be again.

In the long past glory days of Israel under kings David and Solomon, nations did stream to Jerusalem. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed for the foreigners who would come to worship at the temple, those of other nations who would come to know the one true God.

Solomon famously welcomed the Queen of Sheba and others, who came to marvel at his wisdom and all he had built.

The nations didn't stream to Jerusalem to see a baseball field. They came to see the temple. They came to see what God had done for his people. They came to see how this backwater nation had grown so powerful. It had happened only because of God.

In Isaiah's days, the only nations that streamed to Jerusalem were the ones trying to conquer it. Assyrians and Egyptians had besieged it or passed by while searching for more valuable land to conquer. The Babylonians had admired the temple when shown it by King Hezekiah, but only so they could see how full of treasure it was and how valuable it would be if they conquered and looted it.

Yet we see this prophecy fulfilled in what we celebrate today, the story of the Epiphany. Wise men came from the east. The nations streamed to the light of the world. They came to see what God had done and was doing. They came to see God at work, God in the flesh, God with us. They came to see the miraculous event, that God had come into the world to be with his people.

Despite what we sing in the carol, "We three kings of Orient are/bearing gifts we traverse afar," the wise men were not kings. There also weren't necessarily three of them. The Bible mentions three gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), but that doesn't mean that there were three gift givers. They also weren't from the Orient (East Asia); they were most likely Persian or Babylonian. Matthew calls them "magi," which is more of an astrologer-priest from various Near Eastern religions than it is a bookish man of knowledge or scientist of some kind. But maybe they were the intellectual descendants of Daniel and the other Israelite exiles.

Some of those Israelites brought into exile to Babylon remained after others returned with Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. Copies of their scrolls remained behind, too, including copies of the Old Testament scriptures. With those writings in hand, along with their interest in the stars of the sky and their movement and meanings, the magi, the wise men, were able to see the appearance of the star, discover its meaning, and set off on an expedition to find the newborn king. They had an epiphany, and the flash of understanding sent them off on their journey.

Whoever they were and whatever they followed, the magi reveal to us even the story of Jesus' birth isn't complete without Gentiles in it, without the nations streaming to the light of the world. Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy of Jesus, which includes several Gentile women. Even Matthew, the Gospel described as the most Jewish because of its focus on how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies of Jesus, isn't complete without people from other nations.

It's easy to see that when you look back at the Old Testament knowing God's plan was and is to save all people, just like it's easier to find the clues you missed in a mystery once you know how it all turns out. When you look back and see how God used the Gentile women like Ruth

and Rahab in Jesus' genealogy, how God cared for the Syrian general Naaman, how God used the way he rescued his people to bring Egypt and Babylon to know about him (even if it never stuck), how God promised through the prophets that all people would come together to worship the one true God, you can see the clues were always there.

That's what Paul reminds the Ephesians of, that "Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Through the Gospel, through the good news of Jesus, nationality doesn't matter. All nations, all people, are only saved through Jesus.

Now, we still have nations come to the light. Although fewer now than a decade ago, international students still come from all over the world to study at Iowa State. Students come from China and South Korea, India and Indonesia, South Africa and Ethiopia and Brazil and countries in-between. The best and brightest students of these countries and their families travel to the United States to do further research, to study under experts in their fields, to improve their English skills. They sojourn here, living in Ames for a few months or a few years, before returning to their homelands or heading off to somewhere new with new skills and knowledge, new ideas, and hopefully a new faith. They come with curiosity, and wonder about all that they've seen and heard.

Last week, Pastor Mark mentioned how the missionaries in Germany report large numbers of Persian immigrants coming to faith. Missionaries don't just need to know German; they need to know Farsi too! Even if the post-modern, post-churched native Germans aren't going to church anymore, others are coming to faith. Nations are still streaming to the light of Christ.

Even baseball, called America's pastime, is international. The big story in baseball this week is where Japanese players will join after having played in Japan. International draft pools with players from South Korea, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere remind us of the international flavor of baseball. The Field of Dreams movie set has now been used as the site for two major league baseball games, with another one happening this summer. It was built, and now people come from all over the world to see it.

Nations will come, says Isaiah. They won't come to a baseball field in the middle of cornfields. They won't come to a temple on a disputed site in Jerusalem. But the nations will come. They will come to worship the God who came in the flesh. They will come to worship the God who came to save all people from their sins. That's truly good news.

Apostle's Creed:

Prayer of the Church:

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering and Voluntary:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them up to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P: We give thanks to You, heavenly Father, that You prepared before time for our salvation in Your Son Christ Jesus. You set the course that would lead to Him coming to this world as one of us, fulfilling Your promises, dying on the cross, and rising on Easter to gain eternal life for us. and in the confident hope that He gives us His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We pray that in His name.

C: Amen.

The Words of our Lord:

Lord's Prayer:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

Hymn: "Brightest and Best" Hymn # 400

"Hail, O Source of Every Blessing" - Hymn # 409

Dismissal:

Responses for Epiphany

P: Arise; shine for our light has come.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

P: And nations shall come to our light, and kings to the brightness of our rising.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

P: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

C: And the glory of the LORD has risen upon us.

Blessing (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "The Star Proclaims the King Is Here" – Hymn #399

Postlude