

Glory Revealed

Check Your Attitude!

INTRODUCTION

Epiphany is a celebration of the light that was revealed to the world. That joyous recognition reminds us of the gift that incarnation made known to us and to all of creation. So, the question of Ordinary time, or the season that follows Epiphany, is so what? What does that light do for us and to us and what do we do because that light has been revealed to us? We invite congregations to embrace the gift of light that is Jesus the Christ, and to do an attitude check as we stand in the promise of glory revealed.

Epiphany of the Lord (Observed) – **Seeing the Light**

January 4, 2026

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#), [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Color – White

PLANNING NOTES

Epiphany is all about light. The star in the sky leads the magi to Jesus, the light of the world, the revelation of divine love who came to dwell among us. This is certainly a Sunday to contemplate and demonstrate the light reflected around us. Light candles on the altar, bring out some gold or other metals to reflect the light in the room. Take a moment in the service to draw everyone's attention to the light streaming in from the stained-glass windows. But don't forget the role darkness plays in helping us notice the light. I'm not talking about darkness, as in evil. I'm talking about the darkness that helps regulate our sleep-wake rhythms, draws us into a state of calm and peace, and even enhances our creativity. It is striking and worth our attention to remember that the magi noticed the star's light in the dark of night. They needed the darkness to be able to follow the light.

As the first Sunday of the new year, it is also a tradition in many congregations to pray the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer as part of committing ourselves to God in the year ahead. The prayer comes from a longer Service of Covenant Renewal in *The Book of Worship*. As you plan worship for this Sunday, look over this liturgy and consider what aspects you might want to include in your service, whether you use the whole service or just the covenant prayer. If you want an updated version of the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer, Rev. Jeremy Smith offers "Wesley's Covenant Prayer, revised." While Epiphany and the first service of the year do not always align, this year invites us to begin the new year with the revelation of the Christ child. Like the magi, we have wandered over the last year, sometimes across rough terrain and other times over smooth roads, to seek the promise that God is doing a new thing among us. When we renew our covenant together, we commit once again to continue on the path of the Christ child throughout the coming year. We choose to see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste the world around us as bearers and seekers of divine love.

PREACHING NOTES

You can tell that it is the beginning of a new year by looking at the ads that come out in January. What do we see at this time of year repeated over and over? We see ads for fitness equipment and gyms, on the one hand, and ads for storage solutions on the other. We've all resolved, at least the ad makers think, to get organized and get in shape. I guess that means we all want to hear that we are "looking good" this time of year. Whether physically or organizationally, we want to be "looking good." It is an obsession for some, a necessity for others. But it seems to be driving our culture more and more each year.

Someday, I'll deal with that issue here. But not today. I remember when my son, Rhys, who was quite a few years younger than he is now, said to me, "I'm not a good looker, Dad." I was stunned, worried, and angry at a culture that focused so much on appearance. But I tried to hold it all in and talk to him about his perception. "Who says you are not a good looker?" "I do!" he replied in some frustration. "Because every time I lose something, I can never find it! I'm not a good looker!"

Ah, well, now that is a different thing, isn't it? Are you a good looker? It depends on what you are looking for, I suppose. Our Gospel reading for Sunday is full of lookers, good and otherwise. It is a familiar text and, frankly, one we might be getting tired of. We've done the Christmas thing, haven't we? But here come those Johnny-come-latelies, the wise men. Not again?! Yes, again.

In our desire to have a nice story that flows together, we compress the time factor here and put it all into one manger scene tucked under the tree. But Luke says nothing of the wise men, and Matthew never mentions the shepherds or the manger. It is as if they are telling completely different stories. This discrepancy has caused many to believe that none of it is true, and it is all a nice story made up for individual purposes known only to Luke and Matthew (whoever they were!).

I hold a different position, I must confess. But I also admit that there is a lot we don't know. It is sometimes an interesting act of speculation to wonder what we would have seen had we been there when Jesus was born. We don't know how much time has elapsed between the angel's proclamation and the shepherds' appearance. Some argue that as many as two years have passed. They base that assumption on Herod's actions after the wise men left for home. In the "Slaughter of the Innocents," which occurs after our reading for this week, Herod orders that all boys two years old and younger be killed. Since he specifically asked the wise men "what time the star had appeared" (v.7), you would think he got it right.

That reasoning makes sense if you are dealing with a rational person. But Herod is far from rational. He is scared; he is power hungry; he is paranoid; he is Herod! So, it is much more likely that he wants to exercise his power and goes to extremes.

In other words, we don't know how much time has passed. It could be a long time; it could be less than we think. But some time has passed, because Mary and Jesus have moved from a stable into a house. It could be that Joseph's family finally came through and welcomed them. A new baby breaks down barriers that a suspicious pregnancy erects.

The important element, for Matthew anyway, is that the lookers found what they were looking for. They got off track for a while. It makes sense that a foreign dignitary would visit the local ruler, I suppose. But they were seriously in danger of losing their way. As long as they were following the star, they were doing great. But when they stopped to pay a social call, they got in trouble.

I know, it wasn't quite that simple. But Matthew's point is pretty clear. We need to be good lookers. No, wait. We need to look where God is leading. That's better.

OK, let's get organized here: First point - God leads. There was a star, and no one was responsible for it but God. We are not asked to create our own stars. We don't have to lead ourselves in the darkness. Over and over again, the Bible tells us that there is light available. All we have to do is follow it. That leads to the second point - we do have a decision to make. God doesn't send stars to yank us onto the path. We have to look for it, and we have to decide to follow it. God doesn't want puppets; God wants followers. So, we follow. And that leads us to the third point - God keeps leading whenever we decide to follow. God didn't abandon the wise men when they stopped in to ask Herod for directions. It was the star that got them where they were going, not Herod's advice (v.9).

Isaiah says when you lift up your eyes and when you gather together, then you shall see and be radiant (Isaiah 60:4-5 NRSV). It's as if seeing is easy on the one hand, but difficult on the other. It's easy because all we need to do is look up, beyond ourselves, beyond our own desires and efforts, and our own abilities and weaknesses. Look up toward the one who guides and directs and inspires and teaches. Look up. Easy. But maybe it's not easy. Simple, but not easy. Because we get in our own way. We trust our own strength, our own resources, rather than relying on the one who redeems and sustains us. That is why we need to follow the decision to lift our eyes with the partnership that the church gives us. The community of faith can help keep our eyes raised. When we are together, we are more likely to look beyond ourselves, to look out, and to look up. Together, we are better lookers than on our own.

So, how are you looking in this new year? If we claim once more the Lordship of Jesus Christ; if we embrace the truth that God's love is all that motivates us; if we approach every encounter as an opportunity to reflect the love of Christ in how we treat those we know and those who are strangers; if we determine that our overall goal is to seek the Christ that is within each person we meet, then our response can rightly be, "We're lookin' good!"

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

We gather as people looking for the star, a sign that God is at work in the world.

God, help us find your glory.

We gather as people listening for the whispers of the Spirit, hints of the good news in the least likely places.

God, help us notice your glory.

We gather as people yearning for Love's presence, the assurance that we are not alone and Love will have the last word.

God, help us encounter your glory.

On this Epiphany Sunday, may the Light of Love shine among us, revealing divine glory through neighbors known and unknown, vulnerable children, and unexpected gifts.

God, reveal to us anew the glory of your expansive Love that gathers us together and sustains us in loving service to one another and all creation. Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025.

Opening Prayer

Light of God, illumine the path that leads us to healing, hope, and salvation. Glory of God, fill this sanctuary and expose the darkness that stalks our souls. Light of God, shine with such brightness that we marvel in awe.

Glory of God, fill each temple of the Holy Spirit present today.

Light of God, Glory of God, we welcome you in this place.

*Written by Kwasi I. Kena, *The Africana Worship Book, Year A* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 53.*

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God,

**we would like to be among those who saw the coming of the Christ Child,
those who dropped all that they were doing
and traveled to worship the coming of God's love into this world.**

**We would like to be those who cared for God in infant vulnerability;
who tickled and cuddled and comforted the growing child,
that he might know love and safety.**

And yet, merciful God,

**we must recognize all the times we are more like Herod.
Whenever we, in our actions or in our inactions,
find our own need for control more compelling
than the needs of others for health and safety.**

**Whenever we cling to the security of our privilege,
rather than standing up for the rights of the oppressed.
Whenever we are complicit in the harming of innocents
for the sake of profit, or power,
or because we fear to know, and to change,**

the injustices of this world.

Loving God,

**we confess our sins against you and one another,
and pray that you will fill us with your light,
that we may live our lives as true disciples in your name,
without counting the cost.**

In the name of Christ,

the one who showed us the way, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

God's light is present in this world.

Present in the Christ child, born to lead us out of darkness.

Present in the star, in all that guides us to love.

God's light is in the world, and the darkness did not overcome it.

God's grace is in the world, and our missteps will not overcome it.

We are loved; we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.

Written by Eliza Buchakjian-Tweedy, pastor at First Church Congregational, Rochester, NH. Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/12/prayer-of-confession-matthew-2-1-18.html>.

Benediction

Lord of Light—shine on us,

Lord of Peace—dwell in us,

Lord of Mighty—succour us,

Lord of Love—enfold us,

Lord of Wisdom—enlighten us.

Then, Lord, let us go out as your witness, in obedience to your command, to share the Good News of your love for us in the gift of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Written by St. Asaph Mothers' Union, Wales, in Prayers Encircling the World: An International Anthology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 246.

Baptism of the Lord - First Sunday after the Epiphany—**Power of Presence**

January 11, 2026

[Isaiah 42:1-9](#), [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

Color – White

PLANNING NOTES

After the pomp and circumstance of Christmas, Baptism of Our Lord Sunday can sometimes get overlooked. Whether that's because babies always steal the show or worship planners are tired and on vacation during the first two weeks of January, the remembrance of Jesus' baptism can get overlooked as we conclude Christmas and start looking forward to Lent. So, let me make a plug for observing Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, not just preaching about Jesus' baptism, but centering the worship service around the connection between Jesus' baptism, our baptisms, and our baptismal identity as the Body of Christ. In fact, this is a critical point that Baptism of Our Lord Sunday shows us—baptism isn't solely about cleansing us from sin. Baptism is about initiation into community with God and one another, and Jesus shows us the way into this community through his baptism.

Visually, this is a wonderful Sunday to emphasize water literally and symbolically. If you include the liturgy for Reaffirmation of Baptism during the service, make sure congregants have opportunities to hear and touch the water during the liturgy and when they come forward to remember their baptism. Include flowing blue fabric or floating candles on the altar to provoke thoughts and feelings of water. If you use screens during worship, you might try including a soft video of flowing water during the call to worship or the pastoral prayer. Music can also help give a sense of water. Some congregational songs include "Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 605), "Wade in the Water" (*The Faith We Sing* 2107), "When Jesus Came to Jordan" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 252), "Testify" (NeedtoBreathe), and "Water, River, Spirit, Grace" (*The Faith We Sing* 2253). Instrumental music, like piano and flute, can also provide a sense of peace, serenity, and belonging, especially if the music references familiar hymns and heart songs. These are all ways to invoke multisensory experiences that connect the congregation to the story of Jesus' baptism and to our stories as members of the body of Christ of all times and places.

PREACHING NOTES

Have you ever known a polar bear? I don't mean the real bear. I mean those nutcases who decide that the best way to celebrate the new year is by finding a semi-ice-covered body of water and jumping in. There must be some sort of sanity gene missing from these folks. I have even read of mishaps taking place during this annual polar bear swim: heart attacks, frostbite, chilblains - whatever those are. Yet, they keep doing it. Not only that, but they seem evangelistic about it. They talk about what a wonderful experience it is; they bubble over with enthusiasm; they invite folks to join them in their madness: "Come on in, the water's fine!"

I'm always suspicious when someone tells me that. Even in the heat of summer, when a friend is swimming in a pool or lake and tells me not to worry, the water's fine. I don't trust them. I don't like the chill of plunging into icy water. Oh, it can be refreshing when you are sweating like crazy, and the air

temperature hits three digits. But most of the time, I'm reluctant. I don't like to shiver. I don't like to lose the feeling in my toes.

At the same time, I don't like being left out. When it looks like folks are having fun, and I'm standing on the shore watching, my desire to join the party overrides my fear of freezing, and I'll jump in too. Or wade in. Slowly. But I'll get there eventually.

John stood in the waters of the Jordan River and shouted out, "Come on in, the water's fine." Some joined him, and others stood on the shore. He had a word or two for those on the shore, but that is a different passage. Today, we look at one who took him up on the invitation and joined him in the waters.

There are a whole lot of issues that grow out of this little gospel moment, and I can't pretend to deal with them all here. We know how seriously the church takes these things by the level of debate surrounding baptism issues. First, there is infant versus believer's baptism; then there is the methodological question, followed by the liturgical issues (such as, "Do you invoke the whole Trinity or simply baptize in the name of Jesus?"). All these matters have been hotly debated for centuries and are no closer to resolution than they were at the beginning.

Don't look for me to resolve them either! I am a United Methodist and hold to the validity of infant baptism, but accept those who choose believer's baptism as well. I am a United Methodist and recognize that our tradition is overwhelmingly weighted toward sprinkling, but I have taken baptismal candidates to pools and rivers and fonts from neighboring congregations for immersion baptism. I use the liturgy our church provides that emphasizes the Trinity (in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit), but acknowledge that our understanding of the sacrament as a whole comes from Jesus directly.

I can find meaning in all of it. I can find justification for baptizing in a variety of ways, in a variety of settings, with a variety of words. But there is one dimension that has to be present, in my way of thinking.

When Jesus climbed down the bank into the river, John was shocked. How he knew who Jesus was, we aren't told. Maybe something from their shared family history gave John the clue about who was standing in front of him. Maybe a whisper from the Spirit in John's ear as Jesus approached made him think that something was wrong in the way this scene was playing out. Maybe there is just something about the face of Jesus that caused fishermen to leave their nets, broken people to reach out in hope, powerful people to tremble in their boots, and this wild man from the desert to want to fall to his knees and be blessed instead of attempting to confer a blessing. We don't know what happened to cause John to say what he said (or caused Matthew to record what he said). But something did. There was some sense of what was right and what was wrong, and John's sense of what was right was that Jesus should be the one blessing and baptizing.

Yet, Jesus says, "let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (verse 3:15) "Let it be so now"? What does that mean? Let's go through the motions? Let's pretend for now? What is this righteousness Jesus is trying to fulfill?

The truth is, we don't really know what this means. We have some guesses, and some are more certain than others. But we don't really know. What makes sense to me is that Jesus is saying, "I want to join the party. I want to be seen joining the party. I want my ministry, my life, my witness to be about becoming a

part of the body, about joining up with the kingdom of God. I want to be present with those who are longing for relationship and meaning.”

John’s hesitation has to do with, some say, his understanding of baptism being one of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Jesus had no need to have sins forgiven. So, why would he consent to this baptism? Maybe Jesus’ view of what was happening was larger. Maybe John, and most of us, think of repentance as turning away. When we repent, we turn away from our sins and our life of sin. We are sorry for what had gone on before; we are sorry for what we had done before; and we are pledging to not engage in those behaviors again. That is how we understand repentance.

But what if Jesus understood repentance to be turning toward? What if the gesture that Jesus was making was one of inclusion, acceptance, or entrance? This was a beginning moment for the ministry that Jesus would perform. This was a sign that something new was about to be launched, and this new thing was nothing less than the kingdom of God, nothing less than a new way of living in community.

Righteousness refers to being faithful to relationships. You cannot be righteous by yourself. You are righteous with God and righteous with one another. Righteousness implies a relationship. The necessary requirement for baptism in The United Methodist Church is the community. Baptism is a corporate act; it is almost always done as a part of worship. When, in extreme cases, it is not a part of a regular worship service, then the community must be represented. Baptism is an entrance into the fellowship of believers; it is joining with the body. Once you have been baptized, you are never alone. There is always a family around you. You have joined something larger than yourself, which is sometimes startling, but always worthwhile.

Isaiah speaks of this community as well. It sounds like this text (Isaiah 42:1-9) is about a person. This is the first of four passages called the Servant Song of the book of Isaiah. There is considerable debate about who the servant is referred to in the first verse of chapter forty-two. On the one hand, it seems to be the ideal follower of God. Maybe there isn’t a particular reference at all; it is just anyone who seeks to follow; this is the kind of life he/she will lead; this is the kind of person she/he will be. It is an example passage.

Some argue that this was a passage read after the coronation of a new king. It was a reminder to the king and to the nation that leaders serve not for their benefit, not from their power, but as servants of the Lord who called and equipped them to serve. It was a celebration of a new administration launched in hope. Sound familiar? If only all our leaders saw themselves first as servants, what a difference that might make in governing.

Others who read a little further in these verses determine that the servant is the whole people of God. When Isaiah speaks of calling, of being the light on the hill, we know he is referring to the whole nation of Israel that was called to that task. It has echoes in Jesus’ words when he tells us that we are salt and light, the church is the light on the hill, inviting all the world to come and know what we know, to know who we know. So, the servant is the community of faith.

Then, of course, we Christians can’t help but read these words and imagine Christ. Jesus was the servant of the Lord who showed us what a life of service was like. Jesus was one who lifted up the fallen, who received the Spirit of the Lord to bring forth justice. This is a prophetic passage, spoken and written hundreds of years before the one to whom it refers came to be.

Finally, it is hard to read these words and not hear the call upon our own lives. Each of us (as well as all of us, mentioned a couple of paragraphs ago) is called to serve the lord, to work for justice. For Each of us, this is a call passage, an invitation to a way of living.

So, you might be asking, “Which is it? Which one is the right answer?” Well, all of them. That is the glory of the Bible. It functions on many levels at the same time. I believe that, historically, it referred to the king who ascended to the throne of Israel and to the nation that ruler led. Sometimes people listened and sometimes they didn’t. I think it also carried the seeds of prophecy, paving the way for the coming of the Christ. Did Isaiah know he was talking about Jesus of Nazareth? Probably not, but God knew. Just as God knows that we have the opportunity to live as servants to God and to the people. This is indeed a calling, an invitation to live in certain ways, to work for certain ends.

And what might those ends be? Did you notice that the word “justice” appears three times in the first four verses? That seems pretty important, especially when we read that we or he or someone “will not faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth.” We can’t rest; the task isn’t finished; Christ’s work isn’t done until justice is established on earth.

What defines justice? Well, that is more than I can resolve in the small space left here. But a glimpse is given in the passage. To establish justice is to open the eyes of the blind - whether those blinded by material things or limited education or poverty or prejudice or... It is the work of the servants of the lord to help folks see what they overlook. To establish justice is to release those who are imprisoned in dungeons or darkness, whether those dungeons are human-made barriers to freedom and wholeness, sustenance, or beauty, or practices that enslave minds or resources and keep people trapped in a cycle of poverty or on the brink of illness or disease from the lack of sanitary systems we take for granted; or the lack of resources or knowledge that will enable children of God to know how valuable they are to their creator and this world. That is the work of establishing justice on earth - to be in the business of systemic change, lasting change that makes life better for all. These are the new things that are about to spring forth, the new things that we are to tell about. This is the community that we build when we enter into the fellowship of the baptized. It is an invitation to be present with one another.

Come on in, the water’s fine.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Come! Let us follow Jesus to the edge of the Jordan River to be baptized.

We come to be cleansed and made whole.

Come! Let us witness John’s confusion and Jesus’ insistence that John baptize God Incarnate.

We come to join Jesus in choosing life in the kingdom of God.

Come! Let us hear God declare the truth of Jesus’ identity and the truth of our identity as baptized people.

We come to remember and embody who we are as beloved children of God.

Come! Let us worship God who leads us into the baptismal waters and salvation life.

We come to worship God who empowers us through divine presence to live together as the family of God.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God,
at the baptism of Jesus,
you revealed him to be your Son,
and anointed him with the Holy Spirit,
Keep all who are born of water and the Spirit
faithful to their calling as your people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

*Posted on the Church of Scotland's **Starters for Sunday** website,
<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/home>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/collect-baptism-of-our-lord.html>.*

Prayer of Confession

We are incredibly stubborn, O Lord.

We have entered the season
in which your light has been given to the world,
your blessings have been poured out on the world,
and yet all we can think about is our own problems,
our own needs, our own desires.

Help us to desire you, Lord.

Help us to yearn for your presence.

Pour your baptismal waters over us again,

cleansing us from our self-pity and arrogance.

Nourish and heal us so that we may joyfully serve you.

Wash away our jealousy, greed,

and all negative thoughts and behaviors

that stand in the way of our truly being

the people you have called us to be.

Again, let us receive the blessings offered in creation,

in the birth and baptism of Jesus,

and in the ministry of the saints of light.

We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Words of Assurance

The love of God is always offered to us,

freely, joyfully, for all eternity.

Rejoice, dear friends,

this is the good news of our Lord. **Amen.**

*Posted on the Worship Connection page of the **Ministry Matters** website,
<http://www.ministrymatters.com/worship/article/entry/4549/worship-connection-january-12-2014>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/epiphany-confession-baptism-of-our-lord.html>.*

Benediction

Go in peace; love and care for one another in the name of Christ;

and may the Spirit of God, which filled John and Jesus,

fill your hearts, souls, and minds;

may the power of God, which upheld them,

strengthen you for each day;

and may the love of God, which directed their every action,

be your guiding light and your shining star,

both now and forevermore. Amen

Written by Rev. Richard J. Fairchild and posted on his Kir-shalom website. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/12/benediction-epiphany-1-b.html>.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany— **Give You as a Light**

January 18, 2026

[Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

As we move deeper into the season after Epiphany, we continue to explore the glory God reveals among us. While we often emphasize Jesus as the revelation of God's glory, this week's Old Testament reading from Isaiah 49 invites us to consider how God reveals glory through us, God's servants. We are also now firmly in that small corridor of Ordinary Time that bridges between Christmas and Lent. The beauty of Ordinary Time, whether the few weeks at the beginning of the calendar year or the long months through the summer and fall, is that it opens space for us to focus on how to live the substance of our faith in the day-to-day moments and happenings of our lives. Visually, then, consider how to bring forward images and symbols of the ways your community has revealed God's glory in the last year. Perhaps it's a gallery of photos of vacation Bible school, neighborhood partners, and potlucks on the altar. Or maybe you want to pull in symbols and examples of creation from your area to place in the worship space as reminders of our partnership with all creation to reflect and reveal God's glory. The green paraments of Ordinary Time certainly lend themselves to emphasizing God's glory that shines through our relationship with and care for creation.

Liturgically, consider creating space and time for prayers of the people that emphasize the places and people throughout the world in need of peace, love, and care. If we are called to be a light to the nations, we must be willing to name the places where evil and suffering live in the shadows. Importantly, though, it is not our job to tell God about all the terrible things happening in the world. It is our job to tell one another the truth of what is happening around us and how God is at work and calls us to be at work in response to the troubles throughout the world. When we are weary, worried, and worn from all that is wrong in the world, we must remind one another that God, who gives us as a light, is the source of our light. As Derek Weber says in the Preaching Notes, this is how we become a part of the light that we proclaim.

PREACHING NOTES

It might be worth musing about the identity of the servant in our Isaiah text this week. Is it an individual, Jacob who is renamed Israel, perhaps, or Isaiah himself? Is it the nation of Israel, God's people, called to live as the sign of God's glory at work in the world? What are the markers that convince you one way or another? Does it matter? Well, yes. Wrestling with the text is always a fruitful exercise. When we do so and invite others to do so, we are training our minds to think like God. We can begin to hear the message that God had and still has for God's people. In the end, our musing ought to bring us around to the idea that God is speaking about us. We are the ones called into service. We are the ones who need to be the

proclaimers, the ones who carry the light out into the world. We are the servant Isaiah 49 is talking about.

I know it is hard to put ourselves in that place. We don't feel named before we were even born. We don't feel equipped, like we speak with a mouth like a sword, or like a polished arrow from the quiver of God. Surely the text is pointing toward someone else. Well, yes, but actually, no. Forgive the meme quote there. One of the great things about the Bible is that it functions on multiple levels at once. There is, for example, a historical reference here. and discerning that truth can help us understand how this text was used and seen by readers and hearers of these words from the beginning. But there is also a faith reference here. We are being referenced in these words. We are being called to be the servant, the instrument of God's glory at work in the world. So, listen again and listen deeper. Insert your own name as you read.

What you will find as you insert yourself in this text is both a high calling and a profound blessing. The high calling is found in the certainty that this light is a light to the world and not to a single people; it's not a national promise, but a universal one. Verse one declares in a loud voice to the coastlands – our own borders – and to the people far away. We do not have exclusive rights to the proclamation, to the call to service, to the blessing light. Then further in, we read in the voice of God, who says:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (Isa. 49:6 NRSV.)

"To the end of the earth." Any claim for special preference is denied in this text. It is a reminder of the purpose of the chosenness of the people of God from the beginning. They were blessed to be a blessing, as many have noted before. They were chosen; we were chosen before we came into being as individuals or the community we call the church. We were given a name and a task to bring light into the world and glory to God.

Are we up to the task? Well, no. Let's be honest, we fail more often than we succeed. We focus on self more than the other. We keep quiet when we should speak out, and we run our mouths when we should be quiet. We aren't worthy of the call. At least, that is how we feel most of the time or the times when we take an honest look at ourselves. In that, we are not alone. The servant of Isaiah 49 was not up to the task either. "But I said, 'I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity'" (Isa. 49:4 NRSV). "I can't do it," the servant says. "I tried and it wasn't working, or it didn't work. I didn't see the results I hoped to see. I got in the way of my own efforts. Whatever it was, I am not worthy of the call," the servant says, sounding frighteningly like us in our inadequacy.

But that isn't the end of verse 4, you probably noticed. Our doubts and hesitations are not the end of the story. Neither were they the end of the story for the servant of Isaiah 49.

But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God" (Isa. 49:4 NRSV).

"Yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God." What does that mean? It sounds like the end of the sentence that begins "I am not worthy" is "but I am called anyway." The task is beyond me, but I am called anyway. The vision is bigger than I am, but I am called anyway. The light is

beyond me, but I am called to be a carrier of that light until rulers shall see and bow before the goodness and the glory of God. I may never see that day in this life, but I will carry that light anyway.

The Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona, Spain, is said to be almost completed. Sometime in 2026, the last scaffold will come down, and the structure will stand in all its amazing glory. It is a masterpiece of architectural wonder and already draws crowds of sightseers from around the world. Many are awestruck by the wondrous play of light from the immense windows throughout the building. It was designed by Antoni Gaudí; construction began in 1882, with Gaudí taking over as chief architect in 1883. It is said that Gaudí knew he would never see the completed structure, but he designed and built it anyway. When asked about this, he was said to have remarked, “The patron of this project is not in a hurry.”

We are called to be a part of a project that is bigger than we can see. It is nothing less than the reconciliation of the whole world to God. It is the bringing of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. If we catch that vision, then we can carry a light that shines beyond us and from within us. We become a part of the light we proclaim.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, who has God called you to be?

A light to all the nations!

When confusion, disunity, and misinformation threaten to undo us, who are you called to be?

A light to all the nations!

When wars and rumors of wars in our communities and around the world overwhelm us, who are you called to be?

A light to all the nations!

When the vulnerable are left without care or hope for flourishing, who are you called to be?

A light to all the nations!

Come! Let us worship God, who gives us as a light of good news to all the nations!

We come to worship God, who calls us and equips us to reflect God's glory and abundant life into all the world. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Guide our feet, Lord. Show us the light of grace when we would judge others too harshly. Warm our hearts with the glow of your love when we would spew icy words of spite. Illumine our souls with joyful

delight when sadness tries to take over the day. Shine brightly on us today, Lord, until we reflect your glory as a witness to this world. Amen.

Written by Kwasi Kena, The Africana Worship Book Year A (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 84.

Prayer of Confession

And so we live our lives imperfectly, for we are flawed. But we are also loved by the God in whose image we were created. Let us remake ourselves toward that image as we make our confession before God and each other, first in silent prayer.

Silent confession

Gracious and loving God, hear our prayer.
We know we do not always live as we ought:
We turn away from you, from our neighbor, and from our true selves.
We know we dim your light within us,
With our pride, our self-righteousness, and our need for control
We know that you love us, that you do not abandon us,
and that again and again you call us back to you,
back to love,
back to grace,
back to your light.
Forgive us, we pray, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, hear the good news:

the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting.

Let us proclaim the good news:

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.

Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission. Posted at <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>.

Benediction

As we leave this place, remember:

God, who chose you before your birth,
who calls you and knows you by name,
now sends you out into the world—

to bring light to those in darkness,

comfort to those who grieve,

hope to those who despair.

And may the blessing of God,

the love of Jesus Christ,

and the presence of the Holy Spirit

be among you and within you

as you seek to do God's will. Amen.

Posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/benediction-isaiah-49-1-7-4.html>.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – **Carrying the Light**

Jan 25, 2026

Psalm 27:1, 4-9

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

The light has come. We've received the light and the call to bear the light to all the nations. Got it. Can do. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy. Right?! Well...maybe not. The rubber meets the road when we begin carrying the light into a world that likes to hide things in the shadows, push people to the margins, and threaten anyone who declares that things should be otherwise. We quickly discover that carrying the light doesn't get rid of fear. But, as the psalmist demonstrates this week, the light does show us how to not let fear control us and keep us from living in the glory of God's salvation. I'll let Derek Weber's Preaching Notes speak for themselves, but I do want to pull out a few of the themes he unpacks to inform how we plan worship this week.

First, Psalm 27 shows us that we are called to meet fear with love—not the “warm and fuzzy” kind of love, but the love of togetherness with God and one another. So, during the call to worship or opening prayer, consider how you can acknowledge the fears and troubles that congregants bring with them into the space. This might look like a liturgy of welcoming or a call-and-response prayer that names our troubles and hands them over to God, who tends and cares for the things that weigh on our hearts. In keeping with Psalm 27:4, how might you name your gathering—not the physical space, necessarily, but the people who come together in the space—as part of God's dwelling place? How do we come home together as a community in and with God?

Second, having found our refuge in God, we respond in joyful worship. This joy is not a neglect or willful ignorance of the problems in the world, but a choice to respond in joy because of who God is and what God is doing among us. Perhaps you sing “I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart” as a sung response during the prayers of the people, or maybe you have a witness to joy during the response to the proclamation. Or instead of passing the peace, you could pass the joy as a community. If all else fails,

let the children lead. We often need the perspective of a child to help us recognize the small, everyday opportunities for joy that surround us!

Finally, seek God. Now, that probably sounds too simplistic and trite, but it is all too real. Search for God at work in the world. Remind the community that we are gathered as followers of God's good news. Not the bad news, not the tragic news, and certainly not the "I'm giving up and moving to Mars" news. We are people of good news because our story begins, ends, and roots its meaning in God's life-giving, never-failing love.

PREACHING NOTES

Are we safer today than yesterday? Are we on the road to greatness again? Have we finally found our place in a dangerous world, one of strength, security, and self-determination? Can we now breathe a sigh of relief that, regardless of what happens in the days and years ahead, at least we responded to the anger and despair of our own people? Or have we stepped closer to the abyss? Have we turned our backs on unity and progress for a nation of division and oppression, suspicious of the other, protective of those like us, and rewarding the haves at the expense of the have-nots? Have we elevated personal choice and local options to such a level that there is nothing that unites us anymore, and it's every soul for themselves; some will make it and some won't, and that's just the way it is; let's be real, shall we?

Well, maybe neither. Maybe something different. It probably won't be as bad as some think, but it likely won't be as good as others think. It what? The future. The glorious future of our great nation. Any nation. Whenever there is a change of power, there are both hopes and fears. That seems the way of things. Maybe focusing too much on hope sets us up for failure and disappointment. That seems to be the feeling of many who wanted a change, and the call for change seemed to be based on fear—which is understandable, to a degree, in the campaign. Fear is a powerful motivator. People will respond out of fear, will rise up out of fear, will demand change because of fear. The question is, "Are we still being led by fear and those who stoke our fears? Or is it time to find something else upon which to build tomorrow?"

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1 NRSV

The psalmist knows trouble. If the psalmist is David, as some traditions have it, then he indeed knows trouble. Threatened by enemies and loved ones alike, he was loved and despised in turn, filled up with God's presence, and then seemingly abandoned by God because of his hubris, arrogance, and self-conceit. He knew what it was to fear. He knew what it was to want to hide. But David's glory was that whenever he found himself in trouble, he turned to repentance and humility. Then he sought redemption from the only source who could calm his fears.

It wasn't his strength or flexing his own muscles that brought him comfort. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" Whom indeed? You want a list? Because I can find a list. There are plenty out there who will itemize the fears we need to embrace. It is the way of the world.

Exactly. The way of the world. And while we live in and embrace the world, we don't live by the ways of the world. We are called to live differently. We are called to live confidently. We are called to be bearers

of the light—the light of hope and confidence, the light of faith and transformation. Have you noticed that, scripturally, the opposite of *faith* is not *doubt*? Doubt seems to be prevalent in the Bible. Doubt seems to coexist with faith rather well. Remember the prayer of the desperate father? “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” Go look it up: Mark, chapter nine. Jesus doesn’t chastise this poor man. Belief and unbelief often sit side by side. There are indications that belief without unbelief, without a measure of doubt, turns into a crusader’s arrogance, into those who believe themselves incapable of error. A certain amount of doubt gives us the right amount of humility to be effective instruments of God’s grace in the world. Job, who had spent about thirty-seven chapters convinced he was right and that someone – namely God – had messed up and needed to fix all this mess real quick, falls to his face when God does show up. He says, “I didn’t know what I was talking about! I spoke above myself; of things I didn’t really understand.” And God blessed him in that doubt and uncertainty.

No, the opposite of faith isn’t doubt. It is fear. Throughout the Bible, the call is to not fear. Angels said it every time they showed up. God proclaimed it. Jesus lived it. Paul theologized about it. John put it on a bumper sticker for us to cling to when things get shaky. Perfect love casts out fear. Perfect love, the love that comes from Christ, casts out fear. There is no room for fear when we are filled with love.

You can’t get rid of fear with wisdom. You can’t argue people out of fear. You don’t show up at your child’s door in the middle of the night and say, “Now Billy, you know there are no such things as monsters under your bed. This being afraid in the middle of the night is simply illogical. Think about it, Billy.” No, that won’t work, and it sounds odd for a parent to do. Instead, we step in, rush in, and gather little Billy up in our arms, hold him close, and remind him that he is loved—powerfully, completely, unconditionally loved. That’s how we handle fear.

The psalmist says the same thing. Seek shelter in the tent of the Lord, the psalmist says. Hide in God and be lifted up, above our fears, stable on that rock. Then, we’re told, worship with joy: shouts of joy; not sitting in the pew while the worship show goes on but shouting with joy while we make sacrifices. Sacrifice? Animals? No, not anymore. The blood has been spilled already. Instead, let’s sacrifice our pride, our propriety, our stiffness, our standoffishness. Let’s sacrifice our “you first” attitude and offer a hand to someone else, someone not like us. Let’s act like we really have nothing to fear but fear itself.

So, you’re thinking, “Ok, I like the sound of that, that living without fear kind of thing. But how?” I mean, I hear the calls to be afraid. There are lots of things to fear. Our world is falling apart. Making fear choices seems to be the smarter way to go. Acting out of fear seems the logical response. So, how do we get where we can live without fear?

The psalmist is with you. He needs a little pep talk to get where his theology tells him he needs to be, even if his guts won’t let him. Luckily, he slipped his inner dialogue right into the psalm. “‘Come,’ my heart says, ‘seek his face.’” You want to overcome fear? Seek God’s face. Seriously. This isn’t a cliche to make you feel better. It is a program for ridding yourself and the world of fear. Seek God’s face. Set yourself the task of looking for God at work in the world. We claim to believe God is at work among us; we claim to believe God is at work within us. So, look. Look for God’s face in the face of the stranger serving you lunch, working on your car, asking for a handout. Look for God’s face in the gestures of kindness in this terrible world, in the opportunities to laugh and sing, in the moments of grace with loved ones, in the passion of body and soul. Seek God’s face in the beauty of music, in the wonder of the world around you. You’re on a mission. If you fill up your life with the search for God, you won’t have

time to fear. Let me see your face, O God, my light and my salvation! Then, without fear, you will be carrying the light in how you live every day.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Children of God, when fears press in on every side, we can proclaim with confidence:

God is our light and salvation! Whom shall we fear?

When our problems overwhelm us and we feel pressed in on every side, we can declare with confidence:

God is the stronghold of our lives! Of whom shall we be afraid?

No matter the troubles we face, we seek after God and to live in the house of God forever.

God shelters and protects us in the day of trouble.

Come, let us worship God with joy, for God is our light and salvation!

We come to worship as bearers of the Light. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025.

Pastoral Prayer

God of all creation,

who called every being into life,

who is mindful of humankind in all its diversity,

who embodies us with dignity,

granting different gifts and talents to shape life in this world,

we ask for your Spirit to unite us

where we face lack of understanding and disunity

in our churches, in our communities, in our countries.

And in silence, we lay before you the burdens of our hearts.

(Silence)

We ask for your Spirit to unite us

in the face of the conflicts, hatred, and violation of life

experienced in so many regions of the earth

and, in silence, we bring to you the pain of the victims.

(Silence)

We ask for your Spirit to unite us
wherever fear prevents us from caring for our neighbour,
from meeting people of different ethnicities, cultures,
and faith communities with respect
and, in silence, we bring to you the brokenness of human relationships.

(Silence)

God of all creation,
in Christ, we are reconciled,
and so we ask for your uniting Spirit
to help us overcome all our divisions
that we may live in peace.

Posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/09/prayer-for-unity-amidst-diversity.html>.

Prayer of Confession

Holy Christ,
we come to You knowing that we have fallen away
from your intentions for us.

We have followed the paths of greed and envy,
turned away from our brothers and sisters in need
in order to satisfy our own desires.

You gave your life for us,
and yet we are willing to give so little at times.
Forgive us for not understanding that You laid down your life for us.
Forgive us for not recognizing the sacrifice of love,
to live for others instead of ourselves.

Call us back to repent and return to the kingdom of God.

In your precious name, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Christ continues to lay down his life for us,

so that we might have life.

Christ continues to show us the way,

so that we might live into the truth and the life.

Christ continues to love us,

so that we might love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Know that you are forgiven, loved, and given new life. **Amen.**

*Written by Rev. Mindi, and posted on **Rev-o-lution**, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2017/01/prayer-of-confession-epiphany-3a.html>.*

Benediction

God is our light, our hope, our all in all:

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Christ is our home, our life, our joy:

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Our worship concludes; our service continues.

Blessed be God, now and forever!

Posted on the United Church of Christ's Worship Ways Archive, <http://www.ucc.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/benediction-god-is-our-light.html>.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – **What Is Good**

February 1, 2026

[Micah 6:1-8](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

At the center of worship today is...worship. Yes, that may sound redundant and even unhelpful, but bear with me. Micah 6:1-8 is about worship. Now, we can get caught up in the final three verses of this passage, which, to be fair, are profound and worth deep exploration. But as worship planners, it's important for us to take note of the first five verses as well. Creation bears witness as God pleads a case against God's people and demands answers about why they have turned away from God. For those of us whose worship planning happens in the context of a particular space week to week, this opening is especially important to note, because, when we get to verses six through eight, we find out that the fruit of what we do outside the walls of the worship space matters more than what happens in the worship space. God pleads a case before creation because the fruit of our worship is found in how we relate to God, self, neighbor, and creation, not just before the actions we take inside the walls of our local church. So, worship planners, how are we connecting the actions we take in worship to our lives in the world?

Then, our pericope crescendos through the final verses, ending in a question: "What does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Notice that this is not really an open-ended question, nor is it a pronouncement. There are really only two answers here: God requires nothing more, or God requires something more. If our answer is the latter, then we've missed the point. If our answer is the former, then are our lives reflecting the requirements God places on us? So, this is a discerning question, a question that, if we let it, guides us to assess whether our worship aligns with who God is and who God calls us to be. What would it look like to ask this question in worship? Perhaps you could include a guided meditation around this question as a response to the sermon. Perhaps you center your prayer of confession around all the ways we may not have been doing justice, loving kindness, and living humbly with God. Or maybe you introduce the scripture in numerous ways throughout the service so that the question repeats again and again before it gets unpacked in the sermon. For instance, there are a number of musical settings of Micah 6:6-8, including the choral anthems "Offertory" by John Ness Beck, "What Does the Lord Require of You?" by Mark Miller, and hymn settings like "What Does the Lord Require?" (*United Methodist Hymnal* 441) and "What Does the Lord Require of You?" (*The Faith We Sing* 2174). Using one or more of these settings in addition to reading the scripture and referencing the scripture in prayers can help prepare the congregation to receive and participate in deep reflection on what Micah 6:1-8 may mean for how they worship as a corporate body and with their lives.

PREACHING NOTES

Some years ago, my mom needed care for her increasing dementia. It was a difficult time for my siblings and both parents. There were, as you might imagine, a lot of disagreements about how to provide that care. Part of the problem was that my parents lived hundreds of miles from any of us, and we weren't always sure how to help. At one point, a problem arose, and anxiety increased. I needed to make a trip to see what steps might be necessary. When I told my church I needed to be away, they graciously gave

me the time. One member sent me off and told me I was going to pour oil on troubled waters. So, off I went.

Pour oil on troubled waters: what an odd phrase. Do you remember when we watched, with growing concern, oil spewing forth into the waters of the Gulf, and it didn't soothe anything. We recoil from such an idea, despite the colloquial nature of the phrase. *Pouring oil on troubled waters*. But a long time ago and for a long time in history, there was the commonly held belief that a small vial of oil could bring smoother waters for sailing. Most ancient ships' captains carried such vials, hoping never to have to use them, but they clung to the belief that, if needed, the vials would calm the seas.

For any proverbial truth, there are skeptics. Even Ben Franklin, apparently, conducted a series of tests and was convinced there was nothing to it. But others claimed to have seen the effect of a small amount of oil on a large expanse of water. There is even a YouTube video of an experiment with a spoonful of cooking oil and a small pond rippled by the wind. The oil does indeed smooth out the ripples for a time. Maybe the experiments of Franklin and others had too much trouble or not enough oil. The millions of gallons spewed into the Gulf didn't do the trick; it wasn't smooth sailing for a long time afterward. How much oil is enough?

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6-8 NRSV)

How much does it take to buy off God? To soothe the troubled waters of our lives or the lives of those we love? Thousands of rams, then thousands of rivers of oil? Of course, we know better. We know that God isn't bought off by our promises, by overwhelming devotion, by hours of prayer and pew sitting. We know that, but when the waters of our lives are troubled, we often turn to bargaining. If I promise to do this, then God, will you do that? If I offer this offering and up the ante every chance that I get, will God be so impressed that my desire, my hope, my desperate plea will be granted by the awed God?

Micah says, "Don't be ridiculous." You can't impress God. You can't out-give God. You can't even come up with an amount that will pay off the debt you owe. Ten thousand rivers of oil? A drop in the bucket. Thousands of rams? Who already owns the sheep on a thousand hills? My child? My flesh? These were already God's before you were formed in the womb, already ransomed, already forgiven.

Done and done. You can't buy off God because God has already given you your heart's desire. You can't get in God's good graces because you never left. You can't have God bend the laws of time and space because they've already been bent in your favor. Done and done.

But I want! I want so much. I want more than I deserve, more than I can imagine. I wanted my mom to be healed, for example. Already done. Wait, what? No, she was there beside me, broken and lost and confused and unable to function as she used to function, unable to respond as she used to respond, unable ... unable to be the mom I remember and suddenly needed again. Don't give me your mumbo-jumbo about pie in the sky and sweet by and by. I want you to fix this, God.

Already done. He has told you, O mortal, what is good. What is good. What I want is good. It is right; it is fair; this isn't fair. This isn't right. This isn't good. Not by a long shot.

Listen again, my child. God has told you what is good. Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. A trilogy of living in this world. Three actions, three poles around which life revolves. The divergent behaviors that send us scattering around the world, around the community, around the room in the nursing home trying to do justice.

I went down to do justice, to get things right. Things weren't right, and someone had to pay. Someone had to fix them. We weren't getting the information we needed; we weren't being assured that the right care was being given. I went with the fire of God in my bones to do some justice work down there. Except that I found care was being given; provision was being made. They genuinely were trying to do what mom needed done. Yeah, it wasn't what I wanted, but it seems now to fit best. Here we are in right places with right relationships. Justice.

I went because I loved kindness. I wanted to do something to relieve the pain, something to relieve the hurt. I wanted an act of kindness that would fix what had gone wrong. But there was nothing to do but to sit and smile and be present. Just walking in the door made all the difference for a time. Love kindness, not always to do but sometimes to be.

I went and learned again to walk humbly with God. There was nothing wrong with Mom. She was different; she struggled; she wasn't who I remembered. But she was who God remembered. God was so present in that room that it brought tears to my eyes every time I walked in. I can't explain it; I just knew it. I just felt it. I just saw it. In her, from her, in the care that was provided. She was held in those loving arms. Every now and then, when her mind let her, she relaxed a little bit and leaned back. Oh, for grace to lean back.

It turns out that oil, even a little bit, spreads out thinly over the surface of the water, and surface tension remains strong enough to counteract the ripples that would rise up and become troubled waters. It becomes like skin holding back the disturbance. It works, to a degree, oil on troubled waters. Skin holding back the pain, the hurt, the disruption. When mom was most agitated, what worked best was a hand on her shoulder, skin holding back the disturbance. Incarnation. That's why I went, though I didn't know it at the time. I went to do, but was needed to be. I went, as Christ came, to hold back the disturbance with my skin, for a time, a moment, at best, so that we could all be reminded that healing has already happened.

I learned that Micah doesn't give us three things to do, but one. It is all one. Jesus said to Martha, seeing God in each person and walking alongside. I went to walk alongside my mom, who walked alongside me for all those years. Her skin wrapped around me, made me; her skin is in my skin, and together, we held back the disturbance.

If it would have helped, I would have packed ten thousand rivers of oil to come and smooth the waters. But all that was needed was my own skin. Here it is. Here I am. Send me.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Beloved, what worship does God desire of us?

To do justice, love kindness, and live humbly with God.

In our life together as the body of Christ, what worship does God desire of us?

To do justice, love kindness, and live humbly with God.

When we share the good news with all creation, what worship does God desire of us?

To do justice, love kindness, and live humbly with God.

Come, let us worship God with justice, kindness, and humility!

We come to worship God with our voices and our lives. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025

Opening Prayer

Oh God,

Our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer—

How do we thank you?

How do we show our gratitude?

Do you want signs and sacrifices?

Do you want gold and cattle?

Can we turn over our children to you?

Would that repay our debt, make everything right?

Tell us, what do you require in return for all your goodness?

Oh God,

Our teacher, example, companion—

You have shown us what is good,

and call us to remember

that what you require is not

repayment of debt

or settling the score,

but obedience.

Show us, God,

When to do justice,

how to love kindness,

and where to walk,

humbly,

with you.

Amen.

*Written by Dana Cassell, a former BVS volunteer. Posted on the **Church of the Brethren** website, <https://www.brethren.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/prayer-micah-6-6-8.html>.*

Prayer of Confession

Micah reminds us that our prayers, fasting, and pious ritual must be lived out in compassion and justice:

When we forget the fast you desire—
To do justice, and rise up for the powerless:
Lord, have mercy.

When we forget the prayer you love—
To show compassion and care for those in need:
Christ, have mercy.

When we forget the rituals you require—
To create relationships of righteousness and peace:
Lord have mercy.

Assurance of Grace and Peace

Friends, the love of God revealed in Jesus forgives us, heals us, and sets us free to rebuild, restore, and raise up foundations for new generations. Amen.

Adapted from Rev. Susan A. Blain, posted on the Worship Ways website at <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/salty-bright-and-good-service-prayers-for-the-5th-sunday-after-epiphany-year-a-february-9-2020/>.

Benediction

May the holy wisdom of God
Guard your ways and guide your paths
May the living truth of God
Enlighten your hearts and open your minds
And may the living Spirit of God
Give you life, and life to the full!
Amen!

Posted on Literature & Liturgy, <https://jesusscribbles.wordpress.com/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2018/09/blessing-wisdom-of-god.html>.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany — Call to Action

February 8, 2026

[Isaiah 58:1-9a \(9b-12\)](#)

Color – Green

PLANNING NOTES

Last week, we explored how Micah helps us discern whether we are aligned with God's call to live with justice, mercy, and humility. This week, Isaiah calls us to action. Of course, the first action Isaiah calls us to is confession. As we near the season of Lent, confession is a meaningful practice for our communities to engage. As Isaiah models for us, we need to name our sin so that we know what to turn away from. This is not a time for shaming one another but for corporate truth-telling that leads us into living justly, mercifully, and humbly together. Confession opens us to the work of sanctifying grace that answers our confession with renewal and guidance to continue to answer God's call on our lives.

Isaiah describes God's call to action as a fast, which can have some difficult connotations for modern Christians. Importantly, the fast that Isaiah describes is not about personal deprivation but communal flourishing. As worship planners, this is an opportunity for us to introduce spiritual practices in worship that reframe fasting as a focused commitment to God's path. For instance, instead of inviting people to fast from eating certain foods or doing certain activities, invite the congregation to commit to a practice of *visio divina* in their neighborhoods, asking God to help them notice where God is calling them to pay attention and act on behalf of neighbors who are hungry, oppressed, or in need. Perhaps you introduce a breath prayer for the whole congregation to pray during the next week, with the expectation that there will be discussion during a Sunday school class or even as part of worship the following week about what people noticed or heard God saying to them. You could do a general breath prayer or one based on Isaiah 58, like (breathe in) "God, help me remove the yoke of evil," (breathe out) "and seek your healing for me and my neighbors." These and other spiritual disciplines can be introduced in worship and taken with congregants into the week, connecting mundane moments during the week to the good news we proclaim together on Sunday.

PREACHING NOTES

Take the extra verses this week. Isaiah was on a roll that day (whichever Isaiah this was). Scholars determined this chapter comes from Third Isaiah. We'll still call him Isaiah. This is a message we need today—whatever “today” you and your congregation are facing. Whatever “today” has gripped your community, your nation, your world. Too many of us say we don't need the Hebrew scriptures anymore. We've got the gospels; we've got Jesus; that's good enough. But these are the words that Jesus knew, the words Jesus lived by, that called him into the ministry he passed on to us. We need these words to give us hope, even as they bring a challenge and a burden. We need these words to stir our hearts to action. There are breaches that need repairing. There are divides that need healing. There are ruins that need to be rebuilt. There are many who have been pushed to the margins of an increasingly heartless society who need to be set free from poverty, from injustice, from all that declares them less than human. This is the fast that has been chosen for us.

This could be your shortest sermon ever, what I sometimes call a “Nike sermon.” After reading the text, the sermon is simply, “Just do it.” Just once, wouldn't you like to preach a sermon like that? Just once? Ah, but it would probably raise more questions that would need to be unpacked. Just do what? Just do it how? Just do it where, or when, or even why? Yeah, it's a nice sermon prep daydream, but more is needed here. Isaiah says so anyway. So, he starts with worship.

“What is worship?” the prophet asks. Specifically, he asks about fasting. But fasting is and was an act of worship. Fasting wasn't done to lose weight or for other health purposes. It was a sacrifice to God, setting aside one's hunger to devote full attention to the praise and worship of God. But Isaiah notes that there is a problem with the current practice of worship. Rather than it being about the one worshiped, it has become about the worshiper. Rather than the focus being on God, the focus is on the self. “Why don't you see me? Look how humble I am.” The prophet rails, “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day and oppress all your workers.” Your Sunday behavior doesn't spill into Monday or any other day. It's all about you.

None of us would be so blatant, of course. None of us would sit in our sanctuaries and wave to God, saying, “Look at me.” Yet, the “*what's in it for me*” attitude is rampant and often sits in the back of our minds where we aren't even aware of it, until we begin to wonder if we're on the right track. We start to think maybe we should try something else to get more for us, to be more fulfilled.

Isaiah has a different antidote to that empty feeling: Get out of yourself. It's that simple. Get out of yourself. That is difficult and complicated in a culture that focuses so relentlessly on the individual. Get out of yourself. “Is such the fast that I choose?” says Isaiah to the Lord Almighty. “A day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?” (*Isaiah 58:5 NRSV*)

Let's take a moment to breathe. We need to ask if Isaiah is announcing the end of humility, because it sort of sounds like it. He begins in this text with noise: “Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (*Isaiah 58:1 NRSV*) That is not very humble-sounding. He is moving into alpha male territory, some might determine. There is brashness here, a shouldering one's way into the conversation, demanding attention. Add to this the contempt about a fast that withdraws and bows the head, it does indeed sound as if Isaiah is saying that humility doesn't work in our broken world. This is the wisdom of the current age. There are lots of theories about why this is true. From social media to adversarial politics, it all contributes to a louder and ruder public space.

So, is Isaiah anti-humility? Not in the least. But he has a biblical understanding of humility that we have sometimes lost. Humility is not the equivalent of “worm thinking.” Humility, says Pastor Rick Warren, “is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.” That was Warren’s interpretation of C.S. Lewis’s idea about humility in Lewis’s book, *Mere Christianity*. Isaiah isn’t telling us to give up on humility, but to understand that true humility is about focusing on others, particularly those society has marginalized and abused the most.

Thus, the call to action. It is for our own good as well as for the good of society. It is for living out our faith in real-world ways. Faith is not simply a set of beliefs, but a pattern of behavior. Faith is about worship. How do we worship, not just for an hour once a week, but for our whole lives, every day, every moment we are living our worship to God. And God, Isaiah says, has opinions about what worship should look like. It should look like the kingdom vision Jesus articulates. It should look like the kin-dom relationship that builds up the body, that reconciles the world (not just the parts with people like us) to God and one another. It is a call to live worship inside and outside of the sanctuaries we build. That is how we glorify God, how we reveal God’s glory to the world. Just do it.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

People of God, why are you here?

We gather to worship with our hearts and our lives.

People of God, who do you worship?

We worship God, who loves us and teaches us to love.

People of God, how do you worship?

We worship God by breaking the bonds of injustice and freeing the oppressed.

People of God, come, let us worship God, whose glory surrounds us!

May our worship demonstrate God’s glory in our neighborhood, community, and the whole earth.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025.

Opening Prayer

God of compassion and justice,

the worship you choose for us is to loose the bonds of injustice,

to let the oppressed go free,

to share bread with the hungry,

to shelter the homeless poor.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn

and your healing shall spring up quickly.

So, in praise and wonder, we come to worship you

not just with our words

but with our hearts and our lives.

Glory and honour be to you, O God,

Creator of a new heaven and a new earth;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Iona MacLean, First Presbyterian Church, Pictou, Nova Scotia, in **Change is Happening**, <https://presbyterian.ca/pwsd/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/opening-prayer-worshiping-with-our-lives.html>.*

Prayer of Confession

God of glory,

you sent Jesus among us as the light of the world,

to reveal your love for all people.

We confess that our sin and pride hide the brightness of your light.

We turn away from the poor;

we ignore cries for justice;

we do not strive for peace.

Forgive us, God. In your mercy, cleanse us of our sin,

and baptize us once again with your Spirit,

so that, as forgiven and renewed people,

we may reflect the love and life of Jesus Christ

into our world.

Assurance of Pardon

Our God is a God of grace and mercy and love;

know that our sins have been forgiven.

May we be strengthened in all goodness.

Since we have been raised with Christ,
let us seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Thanks be to God; Amen.

*Posted on the **Presbyterian Church in Canada** website, <http://presbyterian.ca/worship/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/08/confession-light-of-world.html>.*

Benediction

As you have been fed, go to feed the hungry.

As you have been set free, go to set free the imprisoned.

As you have been received – give.

As you have heard – proclaim.

And the blessing which you have received

from the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit

be always with you. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Daniel B. Randall and posted on the **United Church of Christ's Worship Ways** website, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2014/01/benediction-as-you-have-received.html>.*

Transfiguration Sunday – **Glory Revealed**

February 15, 2026

[Exodus 24:12-18](#)

[Matthew 17:1-9](#)

Color – White

PLANNING NOTES

I recently learned that the Feast of the Transfiguration was celebrated first by the Eastern Orthodox Church beginning somewhere around the sixth century. However, in the Roman Catholic Church, regular and required observance of the Feast of the Transfiguration was not established until 1457 under Pope Calixtus III. While we could explore what this means about the differences between the Eastern and Western churches, what strikes me most is how this singular event recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels eventually became recognized by the worldwide church (even among Protestants in the centuries that followed) as fitting for a feast day, that is, a day of particular importance and celebration. Though we do not call them “feasts,” Christmas and Easter are feast days in the liturgical calendar shared by Christians across denominations, countries, languages, and cultures.

However, for the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Feast of the Transfiguration is a set date in August. So why do we United Methodists observe Transfiguration Sunday on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday? There are likely a number of reasons, some theological, some logistical, and others political, but I want to emphasize here the narrative and theological bridge that Transfiguration Sunday offers us into Lent. The Transfiguration is a foretaste of the glory of Resurrection, a revelation of Jesus’ divinity that has been hidden, yet is no less real. The Transfiguration does not erase Jesus’ humanity but demonstrates the union of full humanity and full divinity in the person of Jesus.

So, consider how to sing, preach, pray, and rejoice in the glory of God revealed in Christ this week. Sing “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” (*United Methodist Hymnal* 103). Declare the wonder, awe, and mystery that Christ’s glory calls us into. Perhaps even introduce your congregation to the meditations of Pseudo-Dionysius’s *The Mystical Theology*, in which the writer reflects on entering the clouds and the “unknowing” of who God is. Find ways to revel in the mystery of Christ’s glory and then descend back down the mountain to begin the journey to the cross, the tomb, and the Resurrection that will begin in just a few days.

PREACHING NOTES

We hate to wait. There was a commercial many years ago with that tag line. I don’t remember what it was for. But the line stuck with me. Because it is true. We hate to wait. As a culture, as a people, as individuals, we hate to wait. Patience may be on a list of virtues somewhere, but it isn’t one we cling to very well. At least most of us. Maybe because it is forced upon us so often, this need to wait; that’s why we chafe so much. And we aren’t the first ones.

A quick glance through the Exodus text will convince you that there is nothing rushed about this encounter with the glory of God. God says to Moses, “Come and wait.” Moses says to the elders, “Wait until we come back.” Moses is six days in the cloud before God speaks. Then Moses is forty days and forty nights on the mountain while everyone waits. And you know what kind of trouble comes about because of the waiting.

Then Matthew starts our Gospel text with the words “six days later.” Six days? After what? After Peter is called Satan. Six days after Jesus told him that he was hindering the progress toward the kingdom. Those had to be the longest six days in Pete’s life, at least so far. It’s about to get worse, but that’s a story for another time. For now, he’s just hanging out, dodging the glances from the rest of them, who alternate between accusing him and glad it wasn’t them. A long time to wait.

Then Jesus calls him out, and he isn’t sure whether he is in for another chewing out. Instead, it is a field trip. Up a mountain they go, the inner circle – or the remedial class. It depends on how you look at it. What happens up there defies description. Words escape any thinking mind. So, Peter speaks. Sigh. Is he making up for what happened six days ago? Who knows. Maybe he is just filling an awkward silence with his own inappropriate thoughts. But this time, he doesn’t get called out. He just gets overlooked. Or over spoken, perhaps, as another voice resounds from the cloud: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him” (*Matthew 17:5 NRSV*.)

Worth waiting for? That’s the question, isn’t it? It seems like it was worth the wait for the disciples. They were transfixed by the experience. Of course, afterward, they were told to wait some more. They probably appreciated it, since it meant that they didn’t have to try to explain it to anyone. They could dwell on it, reflect for a while. and maybe something would occur to them. Maybe they would begin to grasp that glory revealed is sometimes more subtle than we realize.

You can’t help but notice the clouds in both of these texts. Clouds speak of presence, but also of obscurity. They saw but didn’t really see. How often does that happen to us? Just when we think we’ve caught sight of something, or just when we think we have figured something out, a doubt rises. A question gets asked that we can’t answer. A circumstance happens that weighs heavily upon us. There is too much that obscures our vision. There is too much that makes us hesitant, uncertain. We don’t see as clearly as we would like.

Out of the cloud, there came a voice. That’s the amazing thing about this story. Well, ok, that is one more amazing thing about this story. It wasn’t out of certainty that glory was revealed. It was from the cloud that the voice spoke, that instructions were given. It came after the fumbled attempt to make some meaning, to provide some permanence to this incredible event. It came when shame rose up. What was it that came from the cloud? A declaration of love, and a simple instruction. We try so hard to make things complicated. We want something deep, something profound, something obscure. Instead, we get parental love and an invitation to pay attention. That’s it? Well, no. The instruction, “Listen to him” is more than just hearing the words. It’s more than just nodding along and slapping him on the back and saying, “Good words, Preacher!” “Listen to him” means shaping yourself around his words. It means taking them into your soul, letting them take root and grow into a life worthy of the gospel, as Paul says. “Listen to him” means letting the picture he paints of the kingdom be the vision by which you guide your life.

Behind it, all these words and all this life, is the declaration of love. That’s where the glory is revealed. It’s not the light show at the top of the mountain; it’s not the devouring fire; it is in the simple statement, “This is my beloved son.” It is in the affirmation, “With him, I am well pleased.” When we listen, when we take in his words, we too are God’s beloved.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

On this Transfiguration Sunday, we gather on the mountaintop with Jesus, wondering what we will encounter.

We come to encounter God's glory revealed.

We witness the revelation of Christ's divinity made plain before us.

We come to witness God's glory revealed.

We remember that God's glory is not about spectacle but truth, not about show but about Love made real among us.

We come to remember God's glory revealed.

We follow Jesus down from the mountaintop into the valleys, as God's glory goes before us and behind us.

We come to be sent out to share God's glory revealed. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, July 2025

Opening Prayer

Radiant God, we come to you on the mountaintop to experience your glory. You come to us in the valleys. We meet you in gladness in a place where heaven and earth collide. May our worship of you encourage us on the journey and make us aspire to reflect your kingdom in the world. Transform us and keep us near to you. Amen.

Written by Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology, United Church of Christ. Posted on the Worship Ways website at <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/transfiguration-sunday-year-a-february-19>.

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, we confess that we do not trust You fully.

We put our hope in worldly gain and in human promises,
and find ourselves defeated and lost when things fall apart.

You have given us a love more fully
than anything we could experience in this world
but we do not seek it, we do not hold on to it,
and we look to our own means of assurance and security.

Forgive us.

Call us back to You

that we may put our trust in You and not be afraid.

May we hear the words so clearly

as the disciples did on the day of the Transfiguration;

may we rise up and not be afraid.

In the name of Jesus,

who loves us and offers us forgiveness, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are God's Beloved;

with you, God is well pleased.

You are renewed and restored.

You are forgiven and loved.

You are a new creation in Christ,

everything old has passed away;

see, everything is becoming new.

Go and share the good news of God's love. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Mindi and posted on **Rev-o-lution**, <http://rev-o-lution.org/>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2015/02/prayer-of-confession-for.html>.*

Benediction

Come down from the mountain with mountain-like faith.

Walk on God's paths as bright, shining lights.

Live in God's ways with faith, hope, and love.

Go into the world transformed and renewed!

*From the Abingdon Worship Annual. Posted on the **Cokesbury** website, <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?pageid=830&id=198>. Re-posted on the re:Worship blog at <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2015/02/benediction-for-transfiguration-sunday.html>.*