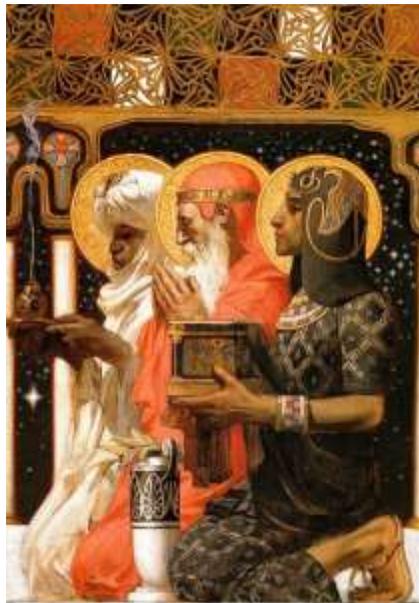




### ***TUPC VISION STATEMENT***

*We are a diverse community of disciples of Jesus Christ **GROWING** together. With the always present power of the Holy Spirit, we share our lives, care for one another, worship, pray, study God's word, and serve both inside and outside the walls of the church. We invite you to come and **GROW** with us.*

## **EPIPHANY SUNDAY**



Joseph Christian Leyendecker, "Christmas 1900 The Three Wise Men"

January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Interim Pastor – Rev. Lindsey Carnes

## **GATHERING**

Welcome and Announcements

### **Call to Worship**

We gather wondering, "where will we find the Babe born in Bethlehem?"

**We will find the Babe in the laughter of children, in the wisdom of grandparents.**

We gather asking, "where will we find the Child of Christmas?"

**We will find the Child where the needy are gifted with hope, where the oppressed are set free.**

We gather wanting to know, "where will we find the Christ who has come for us?"

**We will find our Hope where fear is overwhelmed by grace, where hatred is overwhelmed by love,  
where all people are overwhelmed by joy.**

## Prayer of Praise and Adoration

God of promise and light, open our eyes this morning, that we may see your light in the darkness. Open our hearts, that we may perceive your promises of justice and righteousness fulfilled in the babe of Bethlehem. May this time of worship bring us closer to you, that the good news of the birth of light and love will transform our lives. Amen.

## Opening Hymn PH#50 "Rise Up Shepherd and Follow" (v.1-2)

1 There's a star in the East on Christmas morn;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow;  
It will lead to the place where the Christ was born;  
Rise up, shepherd and follow.

2 If you take good heed to the angel's words;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow;  
You'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds;  
Rise up, shepherd and follow. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Follow, follow;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.  
Follow the Star of Bethlehem;  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

## Call to Confession

Why do we huddle in the shadowed corners of life, rather than running to the Light of life? Why do we love the wrong we do, rather than grasping the good news offered to us? As we struggle with such questions, let us speak to God of all we have failed to do, seeking hope and grace as we pray,

## Prayer of Confession

We confess, O God, that it is hard to be hopeful when there is so much pain and sorrow in the world. We confess, O God, that we keep our heads down and fail to envision where You are at work in our world and lives in a new way. We fail to perceive You, even as You are revealed to the world.

Be revealed to us, O God, in new and uplifting ways. May hope and joy be revealed to us long after the ornaments and lights are put away for another year. May Your justice, mercy, and love be revealed to us when we so desperately need it. Be revealed in our hearts, O God, so that we might break open Your light into the world. In Jesus' name, we pray that all things will be revealed. Amen.

*SILENCE IS KEPT*

## Assurance of Pardon

As the magi revealed Christ to the world, God's love is revealed in us by others who love us. Let yourself be loved. Let yourself be cared for. Let yourself break down and cry when you need to. Let others lift you up. Know God's love is in the words of assurance from friends, the listening ear, the shoulder to cry on. Know God's love is with you when you love one another and care for them as well. Go and share God's love. Amen.

## PROCLAIMING THE WORD

### Prayer for Illumination

Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to the light of your Word read and preached.

Reading of Scripture      Matthew 12:1-12

Isaiah 60:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

### The Visit of the Wise Men

<sup>1</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

<sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

One: *The Word of the Lord*

All: **Thanks be to God.**

### Sermon "Home By Another Road"

Today we are celebrating Epiphany Sunday in the life of our congregation. Today, all the readings, all the hymns point to the star, the guiding light of Jesus Christ. In the old days of the old church, the candlelight service was not Christmas Eve but Epiphany Eve.

We hear the Scriptures for Epiphany. From Isaiah 60: "Arise, shine, your light has come. Those of you who walk in darkness, your light has come." In addition, we hear the same theme expressed in I John 1:5, "God is light and in God, there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with God and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin."

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." <sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

<sup>5</sup>Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,  
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;  
<sup>6</sup>but you shall be called priests of the LORD,  
you shall be named ministers of our God;  
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,  
and in their riches you shall glory.

I would like you to imagine yourself in a black room, in a very black room, in a totally dark room, where the light is all darkened out. A closet is too small but you have the right idea. We need a bigger room than a closet. Perhaps a basement of a large office building, a basement with no windows and when the lights are out, it is pitch black. No, we need a room bigger than that. Imagine yourself in there, and it is totally black. There are no exit signs. No lights from anyplace. Total darkness. It is dark and quiet and you can't even see the palm of your hand. All of a sudden you hear a "boom" and there is a gorgeous fireworks explosion overhead. It is magnificently beautiful and the whole crowd goes oooooooh...aaaaaaaahh.

Why is it that every Fourth of July, when you are outside and you are watching and waiting for the fireworks to begin. You are listening to the firecrackers and laughing and smiling. Then, suddenly, the show begins and a rocket flies up into the air, and it explodes with effervescent light, and the whole crowd goes ooooooohhhh...ahhhhhh. The crowd reacts the same all around the globe. In every nation and every nationality, all around the globe, they have firework displays and the crowd always reacts the same to the colorful explosion in the sky. ...ooooohhhh....aaaaahhhh. Why? What is that?

I would like to suggest to you that all human beings are made in the image of God. We are like God. God is light and in God, there is no darkness at all. Because the spark or light of God is in each and every person, when we see exploding lights in the sky, we all go ooooooohhhh...ahhhhhh. All human beings react positively and appreciatively to light because we are made in the image of God; we are like God who is light itself and the light itself is in all of us.

My oldest daughter was born when I was in Seminary. When we went home to CA for Christmas break, we placed one-month old baby Annabeth in front of the Christmas tree. When you plug in that Christmas tree and all the lights go on, her eyes just sparkled and light up and with her eyes she ooooooohhh'd and aaaaaahhhh'd.

Why do all babies around the globe respond the same way to light? What is it about human beings that we are so fascinated with and attracted to light?

... Now go forward in time and that baby grows up a bit and is now six years old and you have an Advent wreath at your house. You have four candles on the Advent wreath on the table and the child barely notices the wreath. But if you light the candles and there are four flickering flames on the table, the child's eyes are bright and alert and watching. The unlighted candle is dead to the child's eye, but strike a light and the eyes light up. Why? Why do all children throughout the world react the same?

... Now fast forward again and the six year old grows up and is soon sixteen and we're at a campsite far from the city. We look up to the night air and looks up into the full moon and she looks at up the moon and then the moonlight in her hair and still ooooooohhhh's....ahhhhhh's

Why do we love the moonlight? Why do we ooooh and aaaaaah when we see full moons? ... Someday the sixteen year old will be twenty-six, married and have her own baby. And baby is soon six months old. The young parents plug in the lights of their first Christmas tree. With their new baby, they all are mesmerized by the beauty of the lights. Why? Why is it that all human beings are fascinated by lights? ... It is because we are made in the image of God. God is light. In God, there is no darkness at all. The divine spark of God is in all people; God's light is in all people; and therefore all people love and are attracted to light. It is very simple.

The negative corollary is also true. Because we are made in the image of God and because we naturally are attracted to light, that means we don't like dark or darkness. We are not attracted to dark spaces and places. A prolonged sense of darkness makes us depressed. Sometimes we are actually afraid of the dark and don't admit it.

Uo in Trondsou, Norway, it is very dark. This town is located in the northern reaches of Norway. The sun disappears on November 25<sup>th</sup> and does not reappear until January 21<sup>st</sup>. For two months, the sun disappears. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, the day the sun leaves, do you think they have a big celebration? They don't like the day and its darkness. The first thing they do is decorate all the windows with artificial light. They have lights all around their windows in their houses, trying to drive the darkness away. In that city, there is much depression and much suicide.

... I have another question: do you like getting up early in the morning at this time of year and seeing how dark it is outside? No, not at all. You don't like the darkness of the morning; nobody does. When it is dark, dismal and raining outside, you don't say, "What a lovely day we have here."

... Here's another example. Why are most little children afraid of the dark? If you are a child and you walk into the dark house, you often let your mother and father go in first so they can turn on the lights. You often turn on the lights to make sure that there are no robbers and around.

... Or, if you come into the church late at night and alone, when there are no lights on, the church can be scary. I've been in old sanctuaries that creaked and groaned and made night noises that you heard clearly if you were all alone in the dark.

... What I am suggesting to you is that we need to understand human beings, and we human beings are like God. God is light and we have a natural predisposition to enjoy light. The spark of God is in us and therefore we react and respond positively to the sparkles of light in the world. And we don't like darkness at all.

It is with this mood that we approach the Old Testament lesson for today. In Isaiah, God said, *"Those who walk in darkness, arise. Shine. Your light has already come. The glorious presence of God is already upon you."*

What is the background of this passage that invites us to rise and shine?

This passage was written by Isaiah, and people like me call him Third Isaiah. This passage is from Isaiah, the third section of the book, chapter 60, towards the end of the scroll, and the people of God had just returned from their prisoner of war camps. They Jews had just come back to the Promised Land, back to Jerusalem, back to their old farms and houses after many decades in exile. What were the peoples' feelings? Let me tell you, they were depressed. You would have been depressed too if you had seen their homes, farms, and country when they came back. Everything had been gutted by war.

... How would you have felt if you came back to Hamburg, Germany after World War II and all your cathedrals and homes and factories had been bombed out and all that could be seen was rubble. ... When these Jews came back to Israel after the prisoner of war camps, their farms were rubble, their cities were rubble, their businesses were rubble, their sons had been killed, their husbands eliminated. And everybody was depressed.

Into that depressing situation of the aftermath of war, the prophet Isaiah wrote: *"Those of you who walk in darkness, Rise. Shine. Get up. Get going. Your light has already come. God's light is already shining upon you."* He said, *"Lift up your heads."* I love that line. Those of you who have your chins down, lift them up. Those of you who have closed your eyes, open them up. Those of you who are wallowing in depression, wake up and get up. Your light has already come.

These uplifting words were not written during the time of Abraham who had all those wives, all those concubines, all those kids, all that cattle, and all those sheep. Things were going well for Father Abraham, and so he heard the words, "Rise, shine, get up and get going and it will get ever better for you." No. Nor were these words written during the time of King David who was a military hero. "Rise and shine David, and you will win even more military battles." Nor were these words spoken to King Solomon who had more riches and wealth than the world had ever seen. "Rise, shine, Solomon, and you will get even richer."

No. These words were written to people who were very depressed by what life had given them. These words were for people who felt like quitting, who felt like giving up, who felt like tossing in the towel.

What do these words of God have to do with us some 3,000 years later? 3,000 years later is a long, long time. Can such old words have any relevance for us some 3,000 years later? Yes, of course.

All people in the world go through periods of depression. There are no exceptions. I don't know anyone who hasn't been through depressing times. Even children can go through periods of depression. I remember the old Charlie Brown cartoon where Charlie put out the sign that said, "Psychiatrist, 5 cents." Lucy came to see Charlie, paid her five cents, and said she was depressed. She said to Charlie, "I want to go from an up to an upper up, from an upper up to an uppity upper up." Lucy wanted life to always go up, but life is never like that for very long. Life goes up and down and down and up. We all have ups and downs, and when the world is down for us and very difficult, approaching depression or having crossed that line, we hear the words of Isaiah, *"Rise, shine. Your light has already come. God's glorious presence is already shining above you."*

You may be so depressed that say to God, "I don't feel like getting up. I don't feel like rising. I don't feel like going." The Lord then puts his hands under your arms and starts lifting you up as you hear the other words from Isaiah, *"Are my arms so short that I cannot help you and lift you up?" God begins to lift us up and then again says to us, "Rise. Shine. Your light has already come. The glory of God is all around you."*

What are some of those circumstances that depress us? What are those circumstances that make up feel like giving up, quitting, or tossing in the towel? The loss of a spouse. If you lose a husband or wife, you are depressed for longer than you think you will be. The loss of a child. Several of you have lost children and nothing hurts as deeply as that. The loss of a marriage. When marriages gradually die, it is always difficult for everyone, the husband, the wife, the children. The loss of health. I now know that one. It happens so suddenly and life plans change immediately when faced with serious illness or death. The loss of job. Several of you have lost your job and that is tough on the family finances and the personal ego. The loss of home. I read some years back that the number one cause of depression in women was being forced to move against their desires. The loss of self-esteem. The loss of a friend. The list goes on and on. ...Now, all of us experience a variety of depressions. All of us do.

Does God leave us to live in our depression, however justified? When the Jewish cities were in rubble and their homes were in rubble and their farms were in rubble and their temple was in rubble and their lives were in rubble, into that situation where they were justified being depressed, God said to his people, *"Rise, shine, your light has already come. Lift*

*up your chin. Open your eyes. Stand up on your legs.*” The purpose of God’s words are to get us moving, to get us going, to get us standing again and not to wallow in our depression that all of us experience at different times of our lives.

What does it mean when God says, *“Rise. Shine. Your light has already come. The glory of God is already shining above you?”* What does all that mean?

The most obvious is that God’s spark is already in you. When you were created in the first place, God put his divine light into you. We don’t understand how it got there, but you have God’s light inside of you. Why do you like the lights on the Christmas tree? What do you like to see a star filled sky? Why do you enjoy a full moon? The divine spark of God is already in you. Just about the time you feel like committing suicide and tossing in the towel, there is something inside of you that says, “Get up. Get going. Do not jump. Do not quit.” That something is the spark of God, the light of God, the divine presence of God, the energy of God that God put into you before you were born. That is the way you are wired.

But there is more than that. What does it mean that God is in you, is around you and above you? Jesus Christ is the light who guides our feet as we walk on the paths of life. Christ is our light, our guide. He guides us in our decisions. We all have big decisions and little decisions; we all come to little forks in the road and big forks in the road, and we ask God, “What shall we do? What way shall we go?” Pray that prayer, asking God for guidance and God will answer that prayer and give you guidance.

Also, light is the source of energy. You wouldn’t have energy without the sun. Energy comes from that light. Spiritual and emotional energy comes from the Son as well, the Son of God. The very light that is inside of you, helping you to stand up is the same light that is above you, giving you energy. And so you have the energy of God inside of you and the energy of God above you, for God is light and light is energy.

To all of us this day and the rest of the days of our lives, God says, *“Rise. Shine. Your light has already come. My light lives within you. My light is above you. My light is guidance. My light is energy. Get up. Get going. Your light has already come.” Amen.*

## RESPONDING TO THE WORD

### Hymn PH #63 “As With Gladness Men of Old” (v.1,3,4)

1 As with gladness men of old  
did the guiding star behold;  
as with joy they hailed its light,  
leading onward, beaming bright;  
so, most gracious God, may we  
evermore be led to Thee.

4 Holy Jesus, every day  
keep us in the narrow way,  
and, when earthly things are past,  
bring our ransomed souls at last  
where they need no star to guide,  
where no clouds Thy glory hide.

3 As they offered gifts most rare  
at thy cradle rude and bare,  
so may we with holy joy,  
pure and free from sin’s alloy,  
all our costliest treasures bring,  
Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King.

### Introduction to the Offering

We have seen the light of the world. We have been called to follow the star of promise. Like the Magi, let us bring our gifts to honor the babe of Bethlehem and bring the light to all the dark places in our community and our world.

### Offertory Prayer

God of light and promise, we bring our gifts to further your work in a dark world. May the gifts we offer bring food to the hungry, healing to the broken, community to the lonely, and hope to those who live in the shadows of our time. May they bring your light to those overwhelmed by darkness, pain, and loneliness. Accept these gifts of money and time,

indeed, the gift of our very selves. Let them shine for all to see, and be brought into the sphere of your love and righteousness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

God of the Ages, we have faced difficult times in this past year. Remind us of how You cared for Your people when they were oppressed in Egypt, when they were lost in the wilderness. Remind us of how Your love was made known to the exiles in Babylon, and how You made their joy complete as they returned home. As we prepare to return from an exile, remind us that it took years for our ancestors in the faith, and it may take longer than we expect to return from this exile. Prepare our hearts, O God, to love one another more deeply than we did before. Prepare our minds, O God, to pursue justice more heartily than we did before. Prepare our bodies, O God, to embrace and care for each other in ways that honor boundaries and protect each other, but also offer the nurturing touch that many of us need. Prepare us, O God, to love and care for each other as You have loved and cared for us in this time of exile. We look to our future with hope in this coming year, knowing You are with us, every moment, as we wait. Amen

## BEARING THE WORD OUT INTO THE WORLD

### Closing Hymn PH #29 "Go Tell It On the Mountain" (v.1-3)

Refrain:

Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere;  
go tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born!

2 The shepherds feared and trembled  
when lo! above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus  
that hailed our Savior's birth. [Refrain]

1 While shepherds kept their watching  
o'er silent flocks by night,  
behold throughout the heavens  
there shone a holy light. [Refrain]

3 Down in a lowly manger  
the humble Christ was born,  
and God sent us salvation  
that blessed Christmas morn. [Refrain]

### Charge and Benediction

Now, God sends us out by a different road.

**So we may find those who have been left by the side of the world.**

Now, Jesus walks with us down a different road.

**So we may serve those who are lonely and frightened.**

Now, the Spirit illumines a different road.

**So we may take our sisters and brothers by the hand  
to walk in wonder and grace.**

### The Passing of Christ's Peace

One: Having met Christ in this house, let us now share his peace: the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

**All: And also with you!**

Trinity United Presbyterian Church (USA) is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). We are three churches which merged together and became one in 2007. We are a multicultural, multigenerational and multiethnic congregation reflecting the rich diversity of God's people. This congregation is a witness to the uniqueness of the Christian faith which must be responsive to diversity both in the church and in the world. You are welcome here.

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