

Covenant Presbyterian Church
January 1, 2017
Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12
“Epiphany Stars”
Rev. Clara D. Thompson

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of God has risen upon you. Arise, shine, for your light has come.

As we begin a new year, and gather here at Covenant Presbyterian Church to worship God on this very first day of the new year, the sanctuary is filled with stars. The star is shining over the sanctuary as we worship the God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the babe born in a manger, whose birth we celebrated just one week ago. The Moravian Star has been hanging in the sanctuary since the beginning of Advent, and if you were here on Christmas Eve you saw it shining brightly as we sang *Silent Night, Holy Night*. There are baskets of stars on the tables, stars which will soon be passed out to each person here in worship this morning. The sanctuary, the liturgy, the music ... filled with stars on this first Sunday of the New Year as we celebrate Epiphany.

Epiphany, January 6th, the 12th day of Christmas, this coming Friday. Epiphany is the day and the church season in which we both recognize and celebrate the manifestation of God in Christ to all people, all around the world. We remember the wise men who travelled from afar, making a long journey into the unknown and laden with precious gifts, following a bright star in the sky that would lead them to the child who had been born king of the Jews. The wise men followed the star to Bethlehem, and there they honored the child, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It was there that they were overwhelmed with joy, and upon entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and worshipped him. Epiphany commemorates the visit of the wise men, the Magi, who came to Bethlehem bearing gifts for the Christ Child.

This morning, on the Sunday just prior to Epiphany, we will be remembering the wise men's visit and the gifts they brought, but we will also be the recipients of gifts ourselves. Just as we did a year ago, this morning each of us will receive a gift, a spiritual gift, a gift from God. I don't know what you will receive; I don't know what I will receive. The meaning of the gift will be revealed to us as the new year unfolds, as we live our lives in greater awareness of the gift that has been given. In a few minutes the ushers will be passing the baskets through the pews. The baskets are filled with stars, and on each star, a spiritual gift is written. You will be invited to take a star from the basket as it is passed and to read silently what your gift is. Each of the stars represents a gift from God, a special gift for you. How the quality that you pick will be a gift remains to be seen – it may be something you already have – it may be something you will acquire during the year – it may be a quality that you will need to get through the year that

will appear in your life in a surprising way. Everyone is invited to take a star and to ponder the quality that is on it. And when you go home, put your star someplace where it will be a continuing reminder to you. Maybe tape it to the bathroom mirror, hang it on the refrigerator, tack it to your bulletin board, or tuck it in your billfold or wallet. Perhaps you'll take a picture of it and use it as your background or wallpaper on your phone or computer this year. I encourage you to put the star someplace where you will bump into it often, as a reminder of the spiritual gift God is giving to you.

This morning, Frances Parker, who received an Epiphany Star here at Covenant early last January, will share with us what her star, INTEGRITY, meant to her in 2016. I invite you now to listen to her message as you anticipate what God's gift to you will be for 2017.

Frances' sharing time:

Good Morning,

In the summer of 2015 I took a vacation with some dear girlfriends. One of them gave me a book –When God Winks: How the Power of Coincidence Guides Your Life By Squire Rushnell. I've always been curious about coincidences but this book gave me the push to pay more attention when they occur. Squire's primary principle is that a God wink is a personal signal or message from a higher power, God, usually, but not always, in the form of a coincidence. Now fast forward to a year ago today at this same service. Clara told us we were receiving our last gift of the season. I loved the idea that there was still a gift, not material, but one that kept the season going a little longer. Little did I know it would continue to give throughout the entire year and beyond.

When the basket came to me I closed my eyes so I couldn't see the star. The minute I looked at my "gift" or the word on the star I knew it was meant for me. It was a God wink. You see my word is INTEGRITY which was so important to me this year and truthfully always. But this year was a big transition year for me with respect to career and vocation. And the integrity of staying true to myself – to the voice inside – to the God winks – and following the path that is filled with passion and purpose was of upmost importance. It hasn't always been easy. The star hangs in my kitchen and reminds me daily to "walk the talk". I challenge you today to close your eyes – select your star – and look and listen for the God winks in your life.

Epiphany Stars ... each representing a spiritual gift from God. In a moment we will all be invited to take a star from the basket. Keep your star and reflect on it throughout the coming year. How is the gift being revealed to you as the year unfolds? What do you see the gift leading you to do and to be? Pray and reflect and ponder, and see how God works with that quality during the year. Receive the star as a pure gift from God. Our response to the gift will become, in turn, our gift to the Christ Child for the year before us.

Let us receive the gifts of God. Will the ushers please pass the baskets?

THE CONGREGATION RECEIVES THE GIFTS.

Let us pray:

For the spiritual gifts we receive from you, O God, let us be open to their possibilities. Let us accept your gifts with a grateful heart. We cannot yet fully understand the gift you have given to us, but we receive it with thanksgiving. Bless us as we discover your gift in the year to come. In the name of the one to whom the wise men brought precious gifts, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.