

## **Friday, January 01, 2021 - Scripture: Matthew 2:1; Song: "How Many Kings"**

While it is only the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, on the calendar, it says 2021, a new year. Most likely a day many of you have been looking forward to for a long time, 2020, oOne of the craziest years ever, is now over.

But how much has changed? Covid-19 is still here. Our economic and family problems have not magically disappeared. The only thing that changed started at Bethlehem when King Jesus came down to save us from our sins, guaranteeing that in the end we will win. It will be all over for our King has conquered death for us and life eternal in his kingdom awaits. One of my favorite contemporary Christmas songs is called "How Many Kings. On this New Year, many are praying for leaders to rescue them from all their problems, whether its money to pay their bills like the 2 stimulus checks many have received or will receive or providing them with the vaccine to save them from the virus. But none of those leaders can really that do anything to save us. The wise men came to Herod to help them find the King that the star hey had been following was guiding them to. Bu they were in Jerusalem where the palace and King were. Matthew 2;1, our text this devotion says the Magi came from the East to Jerusalem and asked King Herod "Where is the one who has been King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Herod had to ask the chief priests and they told him, Bethlehem in the meantime the star had led the Magi to Jesus, and they were gone back to the East to avoid Herod. Like many, at first they were looking in the wrong place for their King. Earthly leaders and solutions have failed and now God has tasked us with sharing the message of King Jesus, come to rescue us from our sin and ourselves. The Song by Downhere explains so clearly the message of who King Jesus is and why he came in a simple and beautiful way. Listen to it, learn from it, and then maybe make a New Year's resolution to share the song and maybe the message for those are searching fruitlessly for the word's answers to their problem. Jesus came among us, and lived like us except without sin, then went to the cross for us. And he did not stay dead. He rose for us, to prove once and for the reason why he came down from His glory to save us. What a powerful message to start 2021 with. Praying the song and Jesus continue to bless you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wg1j6jepO5w>

**Monday, January 4, 2021 - Scripture: John 1:1-4 & 14; Song: "Joy to the World"**

It is the Monday after New Year's Day, 2021 and the question is, "Are things different, now that 2020 is finally over?" Let's see. School started today and the only thing different is High Schools can meet in person. But it's still masks and social distancing as the order of the day. Colleges still can't go back at the regular time and when they do, it will still be masks and social distancing and hand washing and on and on. Congress is still bickering over who needs what help and we are still waiting for a new President and restaurants are still closed for in-person dining. Looks a lot like and feels a lot like 2020 doesn't it? But is it? It's still part of the 12 days of Christmas for Christians, at least until Wednesday and the fact that Jesus came into the world on Christmas makes all the difference in the world. The radio stopped playing Christmas carols on December 26<sup>th</sup> of last year, but I still have one hymn left in the bag for the 11<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. It is "Joy to the World", of course. This version is sung by David Archuleta. The difference as we begin 2021 is the joy we have is ours because the Lord comes as the hymn tells us. Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing. Despite the circumstances, we have joy because the Lord is come, and he is staying. He is Immanuel, God with us. So, each day we can overcome the things that haven't changed because we know they are temporary. As the Scripture verses from John 1:1-4 and 14 tell us, Jesus was from the beginning God and now has come into the world as the Word made flesh (v. 14). In the words of verses 4 and 5: "In him was life, and that life was the light of mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." In this winter season when the sun rarely shines and many folks have depression because of it, the light of Jesus shines. If our joy is in our circumstances, we are in trouble and nothing has changed since the ending of 2020. But if we put our trust in the Word made flesh, we and all the world can and do have Joy. Remember this, joy is this: Jesus, Others, You. Get that order right and you have prepared room for Jesus as the hymn tells us. If there's one thing we should have learned from the pandemic it's this, it's not all about us. We socially distant, we wear masks for others. We share the Joy to the World with others not only in our words and hymns but

also with our actions. Listen to the hymn: "Joy to the World" the last hymn of Christmas and go out and live that joy!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ryv41dMqS24>

### **Wednesday, January 6, 2021 - Scripture: Matthew 2:1-11; Song: "We Three Kings"**

So today Christmas is over for the Christian, right? It is, after all, Epiphany. This is the season of light as we begin to look at Jesus growing up and how he revealed himself as the Savior of the World, the Messiah. But the Epiphany Gospel lesson and our Scripture for today is Matthew 2:1-11, the coming of the Magi from the East, following the star to Bethlehem to worship Jesus and bring him gifts. And traditionally that is part of the Christmas story, right? Historians, though, believe that Jesus was almost two years old when the Magi visited him. And it makes some sense. Travel in those days was not fast. No jets, no cars, no trains, only camels as the Nativity scenes reflect, and most likely Jesus and Mary and Joseph were living in a house in Bethlehem, no more stable. The census was over after all and most folks went home but Mary and Joseph stayed to give time for Jesus to grow stronger before the trip back to Nazareth, which by the way, was wise since if we read past today's Scripture, you find the trip to Nazareth took a detour to Egypt because of Herod's reaction to the Magi leaving without telling Herod where Jesus was. Today's song, We Three Kings of Orient Are, isn't in a lot of hymn books but it tells the story well. The following of the star, the worship, the three gifts; they are all there is the song. So, as we begin a new church season, Epiphany, it is still about Jesus, just like Christmas. Will we follow the star to worship Jesus and give him gifts? Maybe not gold, frankincense, and myrrh but our gifts of time, talents, and treasures? Will we take the time to worship as the Magi did? If you make resolutions as 2021 begins, what better one can there be than following Jesus as the Epiphany season we will see, encourages us to do. Listen to the song and consider what it must have been like for the Magi to go to all that trouble to follow the star to Bethlehem to the Christ child. Let's do the same. It's a great way to start in 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaheOgdGKJQ>

### **Friday, January 8, 2021 - Scripture: Luke 4:18-20; Song: "Hail to the Lord's Anointed"**

The Epiphany season lasts somewhere around a month and a half, depending on when Easter is scheduled because the earlier Easter is, the quicker Ash Wednesday comes, and the end of the Epiphany season. It gives me plenty

of time to mix in some of the great Epiphany hymns with some contemporary songs of the season as well. Today's hymn, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed," which will be part of some of our virtual services, is one of those hymns. Epiphany is about Jesus revealing himself as the Messiah in his ministry. He often refers to the Old Testament prophecies and shows himself as the fulfillment of them. That's what this hymn is all about. The Messiah is referred to as the Anointed One in the Old Testament and Jesus fulfills all those prophecies. Verse 1 talks about the anointed one, breaking oppression and setting the captive free. In verse 2, it's about rescuing those who suffer wrong and helping the poor and needy as bidding the weak to be strong. In Luke 4:18:21 Jesus stands up in the Synagogue and reads the words of Isaiah 61:1 and 2 which promise that the Messiah will do exactly what the hymn sings about. Then he rolled up the scroll, sat down, and in verse 21 says, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." And the rest of his ministry showed that to be true over and over again. Including his dying on the cross to rescue us all from our greatest problem, sin. Remember that same Jesus is with you today, so you are not alone. He comes in the midst of the darkness of winter 2021 and lights our lives with his love and forgiveness. And now we are blessed to be able to share that Good news with those around us. May that be our task in this time of the pandemic and more. Listen to and sing along with the hymn and be blessed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhDpx3zqqWs>

### **Monday, January 11, 2021 - Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18-22; Song: "God's Own Child I Gladly Say It"**

Yesterday as a church at St. Andrew, we celebrated the 1st Sunday after Epiphany we call the "The Baptism of our Lord." We saw in our Gospel lesson Jesus being baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Certainly, Jesus did not have to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins as all others that John had baptized. He is God's Son and perfect, meaning he hasn't sinned. He was baptized for us, just as we were, beginning His ministry for us, the ministry that would end at the cross and the empty tomb. We needed him to be baptized for us. Because of His perfect life, death, and resurrection for us, it leads us to be God's children. As the title of our hymn tells us: "God's Own Child I Gladly Say It." The first verse starts out, "God's own child I gladly say it, I am baptized into Christ. He, because I could not pay it; Gave my full redemption price." The Bible verses for today are from 1 Peter 3:18-22, which, by the way, is printed at the beginning of the recording of the

hymn that is given in the link for today. Peter begins by talking about Noah and how God saved him and his family from the flood. He says they were saved through water, water that lifted up the boat and saved them from drowning. Then Peter goes on in verse 21: and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.” So, listen to our hymn for today and be thankful, first of all, that Jesus was baptized for us and secondly then because the forgiveness earned for you on the cross was personally given to you in your Baptism. I pray that you can say along with the hymn, God’s own child I gladly say it. May it make a difference in the way you live your lives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYFBvGmauVI>

**Wednesday, January 13, 2021 - Scripture: Psalm 27:13-14; Song: "Blessings"**

For the second time in 2 and ½ months I am writing a song devotion for the day I am scheduled to have serious eye surgery. The last time, you may remember, because of an unexpected Covid-19 quarantine, my surgery was postponed. Some may have said, how awful but as usual God had better plans. Today, my surgery comes at a better time, with fewer cases of Covid-19 per day, a less busy time of the church year, and more. In some ways, the change was a blessing. I ask you to pray for me today as I undergo cataract and cornea transplant and bring before you Laura Story’s song “Blessings” for our devotion. At the beginning of the song, we hear a list of things we pray for, including healing. So, I ask you to pray for healing for me during and after my surgery. I know that God will take care of me, that he will keep his promise to work things out in the way that’s best for me and all of us, as he has promised. Laura poses the question, what if our trials are his mercies in disguise? However it turns out, I believe that and understand that and I hope you do too. I could have been frustrated with the wait, with the delay, but as Laura sings “When we doubt, are we saying that all of God’s promises in His Word are not enough?” Our Scripture verse for today, Psalm 27, verses 13 and 14: “I remain confident of this; I will see the goodness of the

Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." And as I wait for surgery today, I will be confident of that, seeing the goodness of the Lord in this process. I will wait for the Lord. I pray you are able to do so as well. Listen to this song and be comforted. It is beautiful and powerful. It is what we need to hang on to during these Covid-19 times and the time of unrest in our country.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd6J6Wqnv4M>

### **Friday, January 15, 2021 - Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:7; Song: "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light"**

It's another Friday and the end of another week. In 5 more days, we will have a new President. And many are happy, and many are not. Many are waiting for the Covid-19 vaccine or the second stimulus check or maybe a job. And since it's January and we don't have much sun, there is lots of depression. Yet, it's Epiphany in the church, the season of light, the light of Jesus. It's time for a hymn to encourage us to get past these dark moments. Today's hymn is "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light." Because Jesus, the Light, has been revealed, we are able, in spite of all that is going on, to Walk as Children of the Light. The last line of the first reminds us that the star of our life is Jesus. The third stanza talks about when we have run the race with patience and having the joy of Jesus. It leads us to today's Scripture from 2 Timothy 4:7 and 9: where Paul writes to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." So, when the darkness threatens you, sing along with the hymn, "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" and know that the darkness won't and can't overcome, the victory has been won by Jesus, the crown of righteousness awaits. What a blessing that is. What a powerful thought to hold on to and believe in in these difficult times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QISk0oYYpuk>

**Monday, January 18, 2021 - Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Song: "Hail, O Source of Every Blessing"**

It's the Monday after my eye surgery and God willing, I am only a few days from getting back to doing many of the things that normally take up day instead of sitting and resting but who knows? I have written two weeks of devotions ahead of time, just in case, including today's. We continue our Epiphany hymns this morning as today's hymn is "Hail, O Source of Every Blessing." Much of the hymn continues the typical Epiphany theme of Jesus, the light being revealed. And there this hymn, especially in the last verse, talks about our response to the message of Jesus, the light and what his perfect life, death and resurrection have done for us. In the third verse it refers to the Gentiles bringing their offering to the temple to seek God's favor and though the temple they are referring to is obviously the Worship center, what we now call church, there is at least a small connection to yesterday's Epistle lesson from I Corinthians 6. There in verse 19, Paul asks the question, "Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit?" and then ends the verse by reminding us, we are not our own. As the hymn continues it connects the two, hymn and Scripture, as we sing: "May we, body, soul, and spirit, live devoted to your praise." There is much temptation today to live as we wish, as if our body were our own, to do with and to live as we wish. As Christians, Paul and the hymn remind us that is not true. Because God has redeemed us in Christ, being brought with a price, Christ's life and death for us, we are not our own. We are God's. May we as the Epiphany season so clearly points out, live for Christ, not for ourselves. Take the time to read I Corinthians 6;12-20 and figure out what it means and then listen to the hymn, as it encourages you to live for Christ, for despite what the world would say, we are not our own, and that's a good thing!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHKURQp-UT8>

**Wednesday, January 20, 2021 - Scripture: Psalms 35:23-24; Song: "Confidence"**

How often in the last 10 months, have you wanted to say, "I give up, I'm just up for the task, whether it be dealing with Covid-19 or the political unrest or the uncertainty of our economic times. If we put our confidence in ourselves, I'm here to tell you that's going to keep happening. Or if we put our confidence in our political leaders or the vaccine or anything earthly, we might as well give up now. But if we leave it up to God and realize that he is the one in control and he is working things out for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28) we can live life in His peace.. I know that is what I am relying on as I am recovering from my eye surgery. Sanctus Real has a song called "Confidence" that I want to share with you today. It talks about not being up to the task and where they put their confidence. And they use several Old Testament characters to illustrate this confidence. These include Daniel, facing the lions in the den and David facing Goliath. The chorus includes these words, "Give me a heart like David, Be my defense." It led me to a psalm of David, Psalm 35 to be exact, where David says in verses 23 and 24: "Awake and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God, and Lord. Vindicate me in your righteousness, Lord my God." David himself in the Psalm is asking for the same thing that Sanctus Real is. When things get tough if they aren't ready, may David's prayer in the Psalm be yours and mine and may we have the kind of confidence that Sanctus Real sings about in today's song as we face the task that God gives us day by day? Remember, we are not alone, and we don't have to depend on ourselves. Our confidence is in the Lord who is our defense. Listen and be confident, the Lord is on your side!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuzPOVFcFJ4>

**Friday, January 22, 2021 - Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2; Song: "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise"**

It's pretty neat that there is so much connection between the Advent hymns we were listening to last month and the Epiphany hymns that we are listening to now. But it should be that way. In Advent, we were listening both in the hymns and the Scripture readings we were hearing to the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah to come, how he would heal the sick and have compassion on those in need. Now our hymns like today's, "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise," show how Jesus fulfilled those promises, as the Messiah, come to give light to the world. Verse 2 talks about Jesus the Messiah, manifest in turning water into wine at Cana, and then verse 3 shares about the Messiah manifest in healing "palsied limbs and fainting souls. In Isaiah 61:1 and 2, Isaiah predicted what happened when Jesus came, that he was anointed to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. And now they bid us to sing Songs of Thankfulness and Praise for these things happening. In the season of Winter, one often called the time of darkness, at least in Michigan, what a blessing it to celebrate the coming of the one who is the Light of the World, Jesus himself, who is doing all these great things even in your own lives. Sing the hymn, and celebrate His coming. May it be a blessing to you in the season of darkness, whether it be because of Covid-19, the weather, or just the circumstances in your lives right now!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4kpkaSYQ-Y>