



South Mecklenburg

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Service of Worship

First Sunday of Christmas

Epiphany

December 31, 2023

10:10 a.m., Sanctuary & Livestreamed

We Gather

Prelude

Still, Still, Still

Paul Manz

Welcome and Concerns of the Church

Dr. Matthew S. Brown

Introit

Dance Prelude on Bring a Torch, Jeannette, Isabella

Christopher Uehlein

***Call to Worship**

Adeline Bayer

One: Calling all seekers, all dreamers, all believers...

Many: Calling all glass-half-full optimists and lighthouse keepers...

Many: Calling all star-chasers and bedtime prayer speakers...

One: Bring your questions, your hope, your faith and your fear into this space.

All: God is here.

***Hymn**

What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright

No. 152



1 What star is this, with beams so bright, more
 2 'Tis now fulfilled what God decreed, "From
 3 While outward signs the star displays, an
 4 O Je - sus, while the star of grace im -

(C) (G) (C) (F) (C) (G)
 D A D G D A

love - ly than the noon - day light? 'Tis
 Ja - cob shall a star proceed;" and
 in - ward light the Lord con - veys and
 pels us on to seek your face, let

(Am) (D7) (G) (C) (F) (C) (Dm)
 Bm E7 A D G D Em

sent to an - nounce a new - born king, glad
 lo! the east - ern sa - ges stand to
 urg - es them, with ten - der might, to
 not our sloth - ful hearts re - fuse the

(G) (C) (G) (C) (F) (G) (C)
 A D A D G A D

ti - dings of our God to bring.
 read in heaven the Lord's com - mand.
 seek the giv - er of the light.
 guid - ance of your light to use.

Prayer of Confession (*unison*)

Dr. Brown

God of starlight, we know that faith isn't a vending machine. Good news can't be bought or manufactured. It does not arrive with a push of a button. Instead, in this noisy world, we have to look for you in our midst. We have to walk toward you, just as the Magi did. We have to believe that love really can change the world. We have to seek the stars beyond the city lights. Forgive us for forgetting that. Forgive us for seeking you with only part of our hearts. We long to be more like the Magi; may we walk your way every single day. Amen.

Assurance of God's Grace

Dr. Brown

***Response of Praise**

*Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,
 and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.
 Gloria in excelsis Deo; Gloria in excelsis Deo.*

We Hear and Respond to the Word

Church Family Moment

Rebecca Guzman

1. It is a prayer practice in churches all over the world to give people a star word on this Epiphany Sunday. Many of us experience prayer

as talking to God as opposed to silence or contemplation. However, this prayer practice invites a new prayer rhythm of reflection and review that can be a powerful way to connect with God. During Communion today, you will be invited to select a star word. The words will be placed facedown in a basket. When you come forward, take a word, not looking to see what it is before choosing! Consider this a guiding word for the year ahead. We invite you to remember your star word often, seeking the ways God might be moving through the meanings and definitions the word contains. If you are worshiping online, please email Rebecca@smpchome.org to receive your star word.

2. *The Last Straw* by Fredrick Thury tells the story of the wise men from the point of view of a camel named Hoshmakaka. He is old, achy, and cranky, but he finally realizes the importance of his task to carry gifts to the newborn baby king. Listen to a [readaloud](#) and consider what it was like for the wise men.
3. Make a star craft. You can use pipe cleaners, aluminum foil, or just paper and scissors. Hang your star somewhere to remind you to continually seek Jesus.
4. Journal, considering the following:
 - a. What can we learn from the magi, who sought Jesus? What do they teach us about seeking Christ?
 - b. Why does Mathew include the holy family's escape to Egypt in the gospel? What does it have to say about refugees?
 - c. Look back at all of the humans involved in the story of Christ's birth as it unfolds—Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, the shepherds, Herod, the Magi. As God intervenes in their lives (in mysterious and startling ways), what does each person seek? As we begin this new year, what are we seeking?

Children's Liturgy

Rebecca Guzman

As the children four years old through third grade gather for Children's Worship, the congregation is invited to sing (hymn no. 114 stanza 3):

***Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.***

Congregation: God be with you there.

Children: God be with you here.

The children will return to join their families following the sermon.

Prayer for Illumination

Dr. Brown

First Reading

Isaiah 60:1-6

Dr. Brown

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over

you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Second Reading Matthew 2:1-12 Dr. Whitney Bayer

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 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." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "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.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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." 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

One: This is the word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon Overwhelmed with Joy Dr. Bayer

***The Affirmation of Faith** (*unison*) Apostles Creed

Rev. Lindsey Odom

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy

catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer Rev. Odom
... (unison) **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

Offertory *Go Tell It on the Mountain* J. Wayne Kerr

As an alternative to the traditional offering plate, you may support the ministry of SMPC by giving online at www.smpchome.org/give or texting SMPC to 73256.

***Doxology** *Advent Doxology* R. G. Huff
Praise to God, the One who made us.
Praise to Christ, the newborn Son.
Praise the Spirit, ever with us. Praise the Godhead, Three in One.
Clear a path! Prepare the way! Advent leads to Christmas Day!

***Prayer of Dedication** Xander Case
Holy One, this Advent season, use us and use our offerings to touch the world with the Christmas message, which reminds us that God is love, God is always with us, and God provides us with the gift of Christ to show us how to love. Amen.

We Go Out to Serve

***Hymn** *As with Gladness Men of Old* No. 150

1 As with glad-ness men of old did the guid-ing star be-hold;
 2 As with joy-ful steps they sped, Sav-ior, to thy low-ly bed,
 3 As they of-fered gifts most rare at thy man-ger, rude and bare,
 4 Ho-ly Je-sus, ev-ery day keep us in the nar-row way;

as with joy they hailed its light, lead-ing on-ward, beam-ing bright;
 there to bend the knee be-fore thee, whom heaven and earth a-dore;
 so may we with ho-ly joy, pure and free from sin's al-loy,
 and when earth-ly things are past, bring our ran-somed souls at last

so, most gra-cious Lord, may we ev-er-more be led to thee.
 so may we with will-ing feet ev-er seek thy mer-cy seat.
 all our cost-liest trea-sures bring, Christ, to thee, our heav-en-ly king.
 where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glo-ry hide.

***Charge and Benediction** Dr. Bayer

***Benediction Response** R. G. Huff

***Go, all ye faithful! Take the love of Christmas.
 Carry the message far beyond these walls.
 Hold forth the Christ-light. Conquer every darkness.
 Go forth, O Church of Jesus! Proclaim the One who frees us!
 Speak peace! Reach out in mercy, in kindness, and love.***

Postlude *Angels We Have Heard on High* arr. Timothy Albrecht

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Worship Service Notes

Leading Worship this Morning

- Dr. Matthew S. Brown, Pastor
- Dr. Whitney Bayer, Associate Pastor
- Rev. Lindsey Odom, Associate Pastor of Youth & Missions/Outreach
- Rebecca Guzman, Director of Spiritual Formation
- Ann Carney, organ

Adeline Bayer, Xander Case, liturgists

A/V Team: Chris Wilcox, Joe Wilcox

Ushers: Don Ayers, Phil Eatherton, Richard Franseen, Charlie Metzler, Linda Nagle Hanson, Jim Williams

Welcome Team: Donna Brown, Denise Wilcox, Sydney Wilcox

Welcome to South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church! If you are joining us in person or online, are a first-time visitor, a long-term member, or anything in between, we are glad that you are worshiping with us and we want to stay connected with you. To receive our emails, sent on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, contact Nancy Metzler, Director of Hospitality and Connection, nancy@smpchome.org. Also, find us on Instagram: [@southmeckpres](https://www.instagram.com/southmeckpres) and Facebook: [@southmecklenburgpresbyterian](https://www.facebook.com/southmecklenburgpresbyterian).

Interested in joining South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church? Our Session will gather to welcome new members on Sunday, January 28 at 11:30 a.m. To learn more, contact Nancy Metzler, Director of Hospitality and Connection, nancy@smpchome.org or 980-265-2839.

Congregational Notes (as of December 28, 2023)

Remember in Prayer

- David, Terry, Natalie and Eric Gaines as David's mother, Edith Gaines, entered the Church triumphant on December 27.
- Kathleen Bearse and her family as her father, Lawrence Bearse, entered the Church triumphant on December 25.
- Mike Shrader, as he recovers from surgery.
- All those caught in the crossfire of warfare in Israel and Gaza.
- All those affected by the conflict in Ukraine.
- Our mission partners in Bayonnais, Haiti.

To join the prayer chain or send a prayer request:

prayer@SMPChome.org.



South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church

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MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

2023

Welcome to South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church! We hope you will consider joining one (or more!) of our many classes, ministries or groups in 2024. There are so many ways to get involved - we didn't have enough room to list them all here! To stay updated, please subscribe to our weekly email, follow us on social media, or go to our website, smpchome.org. Contact: Nancy Metzler, director of hospitality and connection, nancy@smpchome.org.

STUDY

Conversations with Matt Brown

Every Wednesday resuming January 3, 9:30 a.m., McQueen Room and Zoom
Join us as we discuss the scripture for the coming week's sermon. Contact for the Zoom ID#: Matt Brown, matt@smpchome.org.

Friday Morning Men's Group

Friday, January 5, 7:30 a.m.-8:30 a.m., Chapel 204

This group meets on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month and would love to have new folks join. Contact: Curt Ireland, irelandcurtis00@gmail.com.

Men's Evening Study Group

Tuesday, January 9, 7:30 p.m. Chapel 206

The group meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of every month. Contact: Jon Myers, jonmyers2@gmail.com.

Making Space Mom's Group

Thursday, January 11, 7:30 p.m., McQueen Room

Moms of all ages are invited to join us for study, service and fellowship. Contact: Allison Reeves, allison.tarwater@gmail.com.

Adult Bible Study: Invitation to the Old Testament

Sundays beginning January 21, 9:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m., McQueen Room

The study approaches the Hebrew scriptures by inviting participants to hear the story of God and God's calling of the people of Israel through the many voices of the biblical text. This 8-week study will take a break during Lent and resume for 4 weeks in April. Contact: Rebecca Guzman, rebecca@smpchome.org.

SERVE

Desserts for Center of Hope

Sunday, January 14

Bring desserts for us to deliver to the women and children who temporarily call Center of Hope home. Contact: Terry Gaines, terryg@carolina.rr.com.

Shelter Ministry

Thursday, January 18, 9:00 a.m., Mecklenburg Hall

This ministry meets to fill empty medicine bottles with body wash for Roof Above. Contact: Carol Morgan, morgancc43@aol.com.

Breakfast for Center of Hope

Saturday, January 20

On the third Saturday of each month, SMPC preps, cooks and serves breakfast for guests at the Center of Hope. There are opportunities to serve breakfast or donate items. Contact: Bob Williamson, bobwill31@hotmail.com.

Room in the Inn

February 4, February 21 and March 13, Sardis Presbyterian Church

We are partnering with Sardis Presbyterian Church and Trinity Presbyterian Church. Volunteers will help with dinner, overnight stays or breakfast and cleanup. Contact: Lindsey Odom, lindsey@smpchome.org.

American Red Cross Blood Drive

Saturday, March 9, 8:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Mecklenburg Hall

Please bring your American Red Cross Donor Card or photo I.D. Contact: Bill Ramsey, bill.john.ramsey@gmail.com.

SMALL GROUPS

Handiworkers Group

Tuesdays resuming January 9, 10:00 a.m., Palmer 104

All knitters, needlepointers, quilters, cross-stitchers and crocheters (beginners to experts) are invited. Contact: Judy Jameson, jgjameson@gmail.com.

A Caregiver's Journey

Tuesday, January 9, 1:00 p.m.-2:30 p.m., McQueen Room

Finding meaning and purpose as you care for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia. Contact: Dr. Whitney Bayer, whitney@smpchome.org.

Men's Breakfast Group

Thursday, January 11, Big View Diner, 6637 Lancaster Hwy

This group meets on the second and fourth Thursdays each month to enjoy breakfast and conversation. Contact: Bob Tyler, Btyler@unitedskates.com.

Food for Thought Book Group

Thursday, January 18, 12:30 p.m., McQueen Room

All are welcome as we discuss the book *All the Broken Places* by John Boyne. Contact: Kathy Paquette, khessaquette@aol.com.

International Dining Group

Thursday, January 18, Time and Location TBD

This group explores local restaurants on the third Thursday of every month. Please join us! Contact: Alice Tyler, rrt1317@aol.com.

Supper Circles

Supper circles meet monthly or every other month and are hosted at a restaurant or a home. Contact: Nancy Metzler, nancy@smpchome.org.

CHILDREN

BAM! (Bible and Music)

Sunday, January 7, 5:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m., Sanctuary

BAM! is our Sunday evening program for children in kindergarten through 5th grade. Contact: Rebecca Guzman, rebecca@smpchome.org.

YOUTH (MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL)

Big Youth Group (BYG)

Sunday, January 7, 5:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m., Mecklenburg Hall

Bible study, small group time, good food, fun games and amazing company. Contact: Lindsey Odom, lindsey@smpchome.org.

Youth Mission Night

Sunday, January 14, 5:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m., Legacy Heights Senior Living Community, 11230 Ballantyne Trace Ct, Charlotte, NC 28277

Please join us as we play board games and create door hangers with the residents at Legacy Heights. Contact: Lindsey Odom, lindsey@smpchome.org.

MUSIC

Chancel Choir

Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Do you enjoy leading worship through song? Contact: Zach Bowyer, zach@smpchome.org.

2024 OPERATING FUND CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Thank you to the 270 families who have committed a total of \$1.1 million in pledges to the *Everything Good* 2024 Operating Fund campaign! This campaign funds all of our ministries and operations for 2024. To date, 12 new families have made pledges, and repeat pledging families increased their pledges by an average of 3.2%. Thank you! There is still time to pledge via the QR code. Thank you to our Stewardship Committee and SMPC staff for their hard work on this campaign.



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