



*A Service of Worship for
Epiphany Sunday
10 January 2021*

This “New Year” thing is a curious fiction, isn’t it?
The hoopla we make at midnight on Dec. 31st is a tad over the top
for what is actually just one more tick of the clock.

But this annual ritual allows us to imagine that maybe, just maybe,
we’re on the threshold of something new and better.

And some of our imaginings might come true, depending on what we do.

As Anne Hillman says, “we look with uncertainty” to the future.

But rightly held, uncertainty can generate creativity instead of anxiety.

To that end, here are five questions that Hillman’s words evoke in me—

five questions for crossing the threshold that,

if we took them seriously, might be life-giving for us and our world:

- How can I let go of my need for fixed answers in favor of aliveness?
- What is my next challenge in "daring to be human" in personal, relational, and political terms?
- How can I open myself more fully to the beauty of nature and human nature?
 - Who or what do I need to learn to love next? And next? And next?
 - What is the new creation that wants to be born in and through me?

Nobody knows what this new year will hold.

But if we wrap our lives around good questions—

and try to live our way into good answers every day—

the better world we want and need is more likely to come into being.

HAPPY NEW YEAR, everyone!

May this year be a year of Light and Life for you and yours.

And may we help make it a good year for others
with whom we share this brief but beautiful ride around the sun.

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!
And also with you!

Ringling in the hour
Silence is kept

Prelude

Carl Reinecke

“Sonata on ‘How Brightly Shines the Morning Star’”

Call to Worship

+Opening Sentences

**We look with uncertainty
beyond the old choices for
clear-cut answers
to a softer, more permeable aliveness
which is every moment
at the brink of death;
for something new is being born in us
if we but let it.
We stand at a new doorway,
awaiting that which comes.
daring to be human creatures,
vulnerable to the beauty of existence.
Learning to love.**

Scripture Lesson

Matthew 2:1-12

These are our sacred stories.

Thanks be to God.

Time for Children

+Response:

Hymn to Joy

*Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, Opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the gloom of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day.*

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**Where do we go from here?
We left our country,
Bore gifts,
Followed a star.
We were questioned.
We answered.
We reached our objective.
We enjoyed the trip.
Then we came back by a different way.
And now the people are demonstrating in the streets.
They say they don't need the Kings any more.
They did very well in our absence.
Everything was all right without us.
They are out on the streets with placards:
Wise Men? What's wise about them?
There are plenty of Wise Men,
And who needs them? – and so on.

Perhaps they will be better off without us,
But where do we go from here?**

Words of Assurance

Music

Felix Mendelssohn

“There Shall a Star from Jacob Come Forth”

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

Prayer

Invitation

+Prayer of Dedication

**We, beloved, of whom the Magi were the first fruits,
we are the inheritance of Christ even to the ends of the earth.
Let us so proclaim him on this earth,
in this our mortal life,
that we may not
return the way we have come,
nor retrace the footsteps
of our former way of life.
This is why, too, the Magi did not return
the way by which they had come.
A change of way meant a change of life.**

*Doxology

Old Hundredth

*Praise God the Source of life and birth.
Praise God the Word, who came to earth.
Praise God the Spirit, holy flame,
All glory, honor to God's name! Amen.*

+Affirmation of Faith

**We may ignore,
but we can nowhere evade,
the presence of God.

The world is crowded with God.

God walks everywhere incognito.
And the incognito is not always hard to penetrate.
The real labor is to remember, to attend.
In fact, to come awake.

Still more, to remain awake.**

Benediction

Postlude

Ottorino Respighi

"No. 2" from Three Pieces for Organ

Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Nancy Preston**.

The prelude is played by Patrick Parker, organ.

The Call to Worship is "Blessed are you who bear the light" by Jan Richardson.

The Opening Sentences are by Anne Hillman.

The Unison Confession is "The Three Kings" by Muriel Spark.

"There Shall a Star from Jacob Come Forth" is sung by The Covenant Singers, **David Lee**, directing; Carl McAliley, organ.

The Prayer of Dedication is by Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

The Affirmation of Faith is by C. S. Lewis.

The postlude is played by Patrick Parker, organ.

Today's organ pieces come from a 2017 recital at St. George Episcopal Church, Germantown, Tennessee on their incredible new Goulding & Wood organ. Ottorino Respighi is mostly known for his orchestral works, but he wrote Three Pieces for Organ which are immensely difficult and rarely played.

The second in the set is based on a Bach cantata which loosely translates to a hopeful prayer: In you I have hoped, Lord, help that I should not be ashamed nor mocked. I ask you, keep me faithful in your will, Lord God! Your gracious ear hears my supplication, hurry soon to save me. You are my strength, my rock, my shield, my strength; Take me into your hands, and meet all needs. Amen.

Although Carl Reinecke is little known today, he was a major composer in nineteenth-century Leipzig and taught many composers we remember today. His sonata on the Epiphany chorale "How Brightly Beams the Morning Star" is also rarely played because of its length and difficulty, but the end of the sonata, which clearly states the hymn, is presented here. The text is:

How brightly beams the Morning Star! What sudden radiance from afar Doth glad us with its shining, Brightness of God that breaks our night And fills the darken'd souls with light Who long for truth were pining! Thy Word, Jesu, only feeds us, Rightly leads us, Life bestowing; Praise, oh praise such love o'erflowing.

Education 9:00 - 9:40 a.m.

Adult Education recorded education sessions will be made available on this page: [Adult Education Recordings](#).

This Sunday Ben Ball will lead us in an exercise of using our own life experience in thinking theologically.

Zoom links and materials are available on the Online Gatherings page on our website: <https://www.covenanthouston.org/covenant-gatherings.html>

Announcements

Sunday schedule for this Sunday:

9:00 - Adult Education with Zoom

10:00 - Worship via videos on the worship website

11:00 - Gather together for coffee time with Zoom

Covenant will be holding smaller groups on Zoom. We will also hold virtual coffee time each Sunday at 11am on Facebook.

Calendar

Sun. Jan. 10	9:00 a.m.	Worship Online
	10:00 a.m.	Adult Education via Zoom
	11:00 a.m.	Zoom coffee time
Wed. Jan. 13	7:00 p.m.	Covenant Singers, Zoom Meeting
Thur. Jan. 14	10:00 a.m.	Community Group, Zoom Meeting
Thur. Jan. 14	8:00 p.m.	Community Group, Zoom Meeting
Fri. Jan. 15	1:00 p.m.	Lunchtime Lectionary Lab, Zoom

Helpful Information

Visitor Cards: If you're a visitor with us, please submit a [Visitors Card](#).

Celebrations and Concerns: If you would like to share a celebration or concern with the Covenant community, please submit a [Celebrations and Concerns Form](#).

Membership: If you are interested in learning more about Covenant, we encourage you to talk with one of the ministers or the worship leader. Email Office@covenanthouston.org.

Newsletter: To subscribe to the newsletter, send a request to office@covenanthouston.org.

Office Hours: The church office is currently not open, but we are responding to emails and phone calls.

*Covenant Church affirms the sanctity, dignity, and equality
of human beings and the value of all life in the universe.
We welcome persons of all racial and ethnic heritages, all sexual orientations,
all gender identities, and all faith perspectives to our Christian community.
We stand for each individual's right to worship God and to respond
to God's call to ministry in her or his own understanding
of God's all-encompassing love.
We value a holistic approach to faith and seek to worship in ways that are
intellectually credible, emotionally stimulating, spiritually engaging
and contemporarily relevant.
We value music and art and ritual to express what we cannot ever fully say.
We value participation so that we might hear many approaches
to our shared faith.*

Covenant Church, an ecumenical, liberal, Baptist congregation

Members of Covenant, Ministers

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jodi Bash, Director of Children & Youth

Director of Communication

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

David Lee, Interim Director of Music

Patrick Parker, Organist

Monique Cruz, Office and Financial Administrator

4949 Caroline Street

Houston, Texas 77004

713-668-8830

office@covenanthouston.org

www.covenanthouston.org

Pursuant to Section 30.06, Penal Code (trespass by license holder with a concealed handgun), a person licensed under Subchapter H, Chapter 411, Government Code (handgun licensing law), may not enter this property with a concealed handgun.

Pursuant to Section 30.07, Penal Code (trespass by license holder with an openly carried handgun), a person licensed under Subchapter H, Chapter 411, Government Code (handgun licensing law), may not enter this property with a handgun that is carried openly.