



Williamsburg United Methodist Church

5750 Williamsburg Road
Williamsburg, MI 49690
wumctoday.com

Pastor: Matthew Chapman
Admin. Janet Goss

pastor.matthew.chapman@gmail.com
wumctoday@gmail.com

231.342.6422
231.267.5792

Office Hours: Mon. 9-11, Wed. 9-11, Thurs. 9-11

In the Epiphany story, God used dreams to warn the magi and the holy family about the dangers of political powers at play. Rev. Jerry Devine invites us to see how we might face the Herod look-alikes in our time and find the courage to find different pathways forward.

REV. JERRY DEVINE
Retired Elder, Michigan Conference

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt (Matthew 2:11-14, NIV).

The Epiphany story in the Gospel of Matthew is filled with political dynamics, power plays, interfaith explorations, and adaptive leadership decisions. It sounds like the national and international news cycles of our time. Regrettably, most of us were likely taught the romanticized version of the Epiphany story, with the three wise men coming peacefully to worship the newborn king in a stable. Many of us remember fondly singing:

*We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar —
Field and fountain, moor and mountain — following yonder star.
O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.*

Perhaps we even played one of the mysterious magi in a Christmas pageant. Some of us grew up with all the characters showing up on Christmas Eve and then disappearing quickly the days following Christmas. This version is more comfortable, as we can bask in it and then put it away in boxes until next year. However, this version avoids revealing and considering Herod's abusive power, his panic about anyone else having access to power, and his promise of retribution.

We do our faith commitment a disservice if we try to sugarcoat this with religious tripe. This did not take place simply to fulfill a verse from the Hebrew Scriptures. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were asylum-seekers who fled their homeland out of fear. The entire region was under the occupation of Rome, with soldiers ready to harshly carry out demands to maintain order and control. Regional political leaders, such as Herod, were allowed to remain in power and privilege only as they collaborated with the occupation forces. The toddler Jesus and his family were living during a complex time. This experience and the years that followed undoubtedly shaped Jesus' worldview and how he approached marginalized people in his time. A beloved friend and colleague of mine, Rev. Dee Stickley-Miner, recently posted on social media her deep concern about the current threat of powerful leaders in the United States to conduct a mass deportation of individuals and whole families who felt forced to flee their homelands to stay alive. This could include family members who are actually U.S. citizens. Dee gave me permission to share her comment, which is timely and poignant for this Epiphany 2025: "If we slow down enough to wonder what pushed people on their journey to our community, we might just find judgment replaced by empathy. Jesus was undocumented." Thankfully, even joyfully, the biblical text makes it clear that Yahweh, God of all creation, used dreams to warn the wise visitors and the holy family about the dangers of political powers at play. In an old hard-copy dictionary, I found this definition of the word *epiphany*: "A spiritual event in which the essence of a given object of manifestation appears to the subject, as in a sudden flash of recognition." [emphasis mine]

One aspect of our celebration of the day of Epiphany could be those "sudden flashes of recognition" God gave to those who were the target of oppression. This also means that God did not give that inner knowledge or awareness to those whose use of power was not for the common well-being of others. God did not eliminate the abusive leaders but chose to empower those at risk so that they could choose a different pathway forward. They were given courage to resist collaboration, adapt their leadership, and thwart the impact of those abusing them.

The late theologian and civil rights activist Dr. James H. Cone framed it this way in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*: "The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair."

The holy family's escape to Egypt — their seeking of asylum, in essence — is God's just love sneering in the face of oppressive rulers like Herod. Epiphany reminds us again and again that when we are in places or times of duress, God leans in closely to give us guidance and courage. God nudges us, often through dreams, to help us find a different pathway forward. Epiphany reminds us that God's love does not abandon us in the darkened times of our lives.

Our United Methodist Church is in a new era of trying to faithfully and transformatively live into what it means to be a worldwide church with regional relevance and expressions. Abusive power and leadership are not the only issues we face here in the United States. There are many Herod look-alikes across various countries. May this Epiphany be a time of immense dreaming and listening for how God will lean close to give us guidance and courage to find different pathways forward, pathways that lead to hope and justice for all of God's creation. May we be gifted with sudden flashes of recognition.

JANUARY 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Happy New Year!	2	3	4
5 Worship 9am Coffee Fellowship	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Worship 9am Communion Coffee Fellowship	13	14	15 AD Council Meeting 9am	16	17	18
19 Worship 9am Coffee Fellowship	20 MLK Day	21	22	23	24	25
26 Worship 9am Coffee Fellowship	27	28	29	30	31	

AA SCHEDULE
Monday, 7:00pm
Saturday, 7pm

J A N U A R Y C E L E B R A T I O N S !

JANUARY

4th Sue Burrows

6th River Goss

7th Clara Hasenick

8th Sue Morrison

8th Donn Hubbell

9th Carol Walter

11th Jan & Steve Donker's Anniv.

13th Sherry Boucher

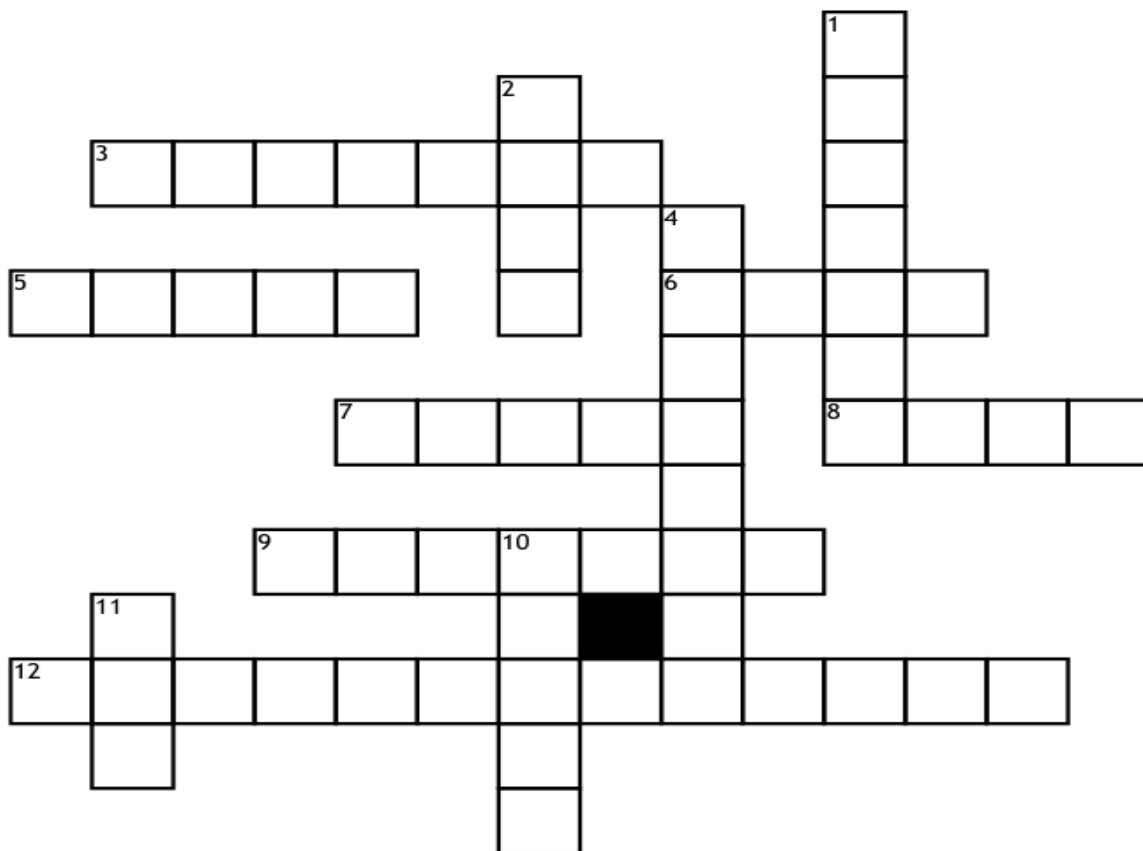
15th Jaclyn Voice

18th Pam & John Hamstra's Anniv.

24th Zach Reece

31st Sue Mull

Winter



Across

3. You wear these on your hands.
 5. You wear this around your neck.
 6. What is the temperature in winter?
 7. You wear these on your feet
 8. What do you use to slide down a hill in the winter?

9. What is made of three snow balls and has a face?

12. What winter holiday do you give hearts?

Down

1. What is formed by water and freezes into spikes?

2. What is white and falls from the sky?

4. What can you do on a frozen lake or pond?

10. What is the color of snow

11. You wear this on your head



JANUARY 2025 NEWSLETTER
Williamsburg United Methodist Church
5750 Williamsburg Road
PO Box 40
Williamsburg, MI 49690