



COVENANT CHURCH

HOUSTON

A Service of Worship for
Epiphany Sunday
4 January 2026

Once upon a time there were some very wise men who were all sitting in their own countries minding their own business when a bright star lodged in the right eye of each of them. It was so bright that none of them could tell whether it was burning in the sky or in their own imagination, but they were wise enough to know that it didn't matter. The point was, something beyond them was calling them, and it was a tug they had been waiting for all their lives.

— Barbara Brown Taylor

Preparing for worship with silence

Gathering in peace

Peace be with you!
And also with you!

Ringing in the hour

Silence is kept

*Prelude

“Prelude on the Introit for Epiphany”

Maurice Duruflé
(1902-1986)

Call to Worship

⁺Opening Hymn #68

“What Star Is This, with Beams So Bright”

Puer Nobis Nascitur

**What star is this, with beams so bright,
More lovely than the noon-day light?
‘Tis sent to announce a newborn King,
Glad tidings of our God to bring**

**‘Tis now fulfilled what God decreed,
“From Jacob shall a star proceed,”
And lo! the Eastern sages stand
To read in heaven the Lord’s command.**

**O Jesus, while the star of grace
Impels us on to seek Your face,
Let not our slothful hearts refuse
The guidance of Your light to use.**

**To God the Father, God the Son,
And Holy Spirit, Three in one,
May every tongue and nation raise
An endless song of thankful praise.**

**Please hold silence and remain seated during the prelude*

+Please stand in body or spirit

⁺Opening Prayer

On Epiphany day, we are still the people walking.

We are still people in the dark,

and the darkness looms large around us,

beset as we are by fear,

anxiety,

brutality,

violence,

loss —

a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.

We are — we could be — people of your light.

So we pray for the light of your glorious presence

as we wait for your appearing;

we pray for the light of your wondrous grace

as we exhaust our coping capacity;

we pray for your gift of newness that

will override our weariness;

we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust

in your good rule.

That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact

your rule through the demands of this day.

We submit our day to you and to your rule,

with deep joy and high hope.

Invitation

Missions Invitation

Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:9-12

These are our sacred stories.

Thanks be to God.

+Please stand in body or spirit

Time for Children

First Sunday Food Offering

⁺ Response:

Greensleeves

**What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

Call to Confession

Silent Confession

Unison Confession

**When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.**

Words of Assurance

Music

“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly”

Carl Wiltse

(1945-2021)

Silent Reflection

Proclamation

⁺Hymn

Waltham

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

**I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to all.
I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th'unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to all.**

**And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to all."**

**Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to all."**

Prayer

Offering

Offertory

Olivier Messiaen

"Regard du Père" from *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1908–1992)

We will tithe the cash offerings on the first Sunday of each month. This means that we will give 100% of the cash offerings to one of the mission organizations that Covenant partners with on that Sunday. These funds will be above and beyond what Covenant has budgeted to give to Missions. Today's cash offerings will go to Plant It Forward, a Houston based non-profit organization that empowers refugees to develop sustainable urban farming businesses, producing fresh, healthy food for our community.

+Please stand in body or spirit

⁺Responsive Prayer of Dedication

Although the beckoning star heeded by the wise travelers long ago no longer leads the way,

The manger-born Christ is still to be found and followed.

We are not brought to our knees in surprise as were those journeyers of old,

Yet our desire to worship can be as deep as theirs.

And though we do not bear gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh,

We offer ourselves and what we have.

The story continues. The good news abounds. There is a living Christ to discover and worship and serve.

Let us rejoice and be glad!

⁺Doxology

Greensleaves

**So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
Come, one and all, to own Him.
The King of kings salvation brings;
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
the Babe, the Son of Mary!**

⁺Affirmation of Faith

**To discover how to be truthful now...
To discover how to be living now...
To discover how to be loving now...
To discover how to be human now...
Is the reason we follow this star.**

⁺Closing Hymn #22

Regent Square

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory”

**Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye, who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

+Please stand in body or spirit

**Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant light:
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

**Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

**All creation, join in praising
God the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your voices raising
To the eternal Three in One.
Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King!**

Benediction

*Postlude

“Bright and Glorious is the Sky”

Emma Lou Diemer

(1927-2024)

+Please stand in body or spirit

**Please hold silence and remain seated during the postlude*

Worship Notes

The worship leader is **Daniel Sanborn**.

The Call to Worship is by Jan Richardson.

The Opening Prayer is from *Prayers for a Privileged People* by Walter Brueggemann.

Sally Ridgway gives the Missions Invitation.

The Unison Confession is “The Work of Christmas” by Howard Thurman.

Members of the Covenant Handbells are **Sebastian Alexander, Sterling Alexander, Amanda Cox-Floyd, Lucas Cuellar, Mauricio Cuellar, Kristy Kyle, Laura Mayo, Sabrina Neff, Daniel Sanborn, Elyse Sanborn, Reid Sanborn, Sharron Sanborn, Grayson Stepp, Owen Stepp, and Kathleen Yaeger**.

The pianist is **Julian Laureles**.

Deacon Jeff Turner gives the prayer.

The Prayer of Dedication is by Glen E. Rainsley from *Touch Holiness*, edited by Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi.

The Affirmation of Faith is by W.H. Auden.

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About Today's Service

Messiaen's "Regard du Père" is the first piece of twenty in a suite titled *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* ("Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus"). The suite was written during Paris' liberation from Nazi occupation in 1944 and is themed around the nativity of Christ. It is a masterpiece of the modern classical period, which is characterized by its avant-garde innovation, stepping away from traditional rhythmic, harmonic and tonal norms. "Regard du Père" completely ignores a set time signature or key signature and uses complex and dissonant chords. It is played extremely slowly and quietly, creating a meditative atmosphere, such that the first measure alone lasts nearly thirty seconds. This experimental compositional style differentiates the piece from earlier classical odes to Jesus. Rather than using pleasant, beautiful harmonies, it seems more random and unresolved to the ear, which evokes a more chaotic and human beauty. Thus, although religious symbolism is very common among classical pieces, "Regard du Père" and the rest of *Vingt Regards* uses it in an innovative way by using experimental modern musical ideas to convey its imagery.

—*Julian Laureles*

Announcements

The Young Adult Group will volunteer at Montrose Grace Place on Monday, January 5.

Committees will meet on these dates in 2026: February 8, April 26, August 9, & November 8.

Children and Youth Announcements

January 4 - No Youth Fellowship

January 17 - CCSC Family Service Day, 12:00 -1:15 p.m.

February 15 - Children & Youth Auction

Calendar

Sun. January 4	12pm	Epiphany Chalk Blessings, Sidewalk.
	12pm	Handbell Lunch, Huff Fellowship Hall.
	1:00pm	Handbell Workshop, Huff Fellowship Hall.
Mon. January 5	5:30pm	Young Adult Group volunteering at Montrose Grace Place, off-site.
	7pm	Insight Meditation Houston, Huff Fellowship Hall.
Thurs. January 8	10am	Community Group, Zoom.
	7:15pm	Covenant Singers Rehearsal, Sanctuary.
Sun. January 11	9:30am	Adult Education, 2nd floor of Huff Fellowship Hall building:
	9:30am	Handbell Rehearsal, Huff Fellowship Hall.
	10:30am	Covenant Singers Rehearsal, Sanctuary.

Information

Childcare is provided in the children's area beginning at 9:30 a.m. Children aged 2 and under are invited to the nursery. Children aged 3 to 9 are invited to the children's area after the Time for Children.

All-Gender Restrooms are located in the Huff Fellowship Hall building.

Covenant Recycles: If you do not wish to keep your order of worship, please recycle it by placing it on the stand located in the narthex.

Office Hours: The Church Office is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 8am-3pm, and Tuesday from 1pm-5pm.

Helpful Links: Scan here for digital Visitor and Celebration & Concern Cards; any sign-up forms mentioned in the Announcements; and other useful information.



*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 with a personal 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

Fran Avera, Minister of Music, Emerita

Trena' Jamison, Children and Youth Coordinator

Heather Laureles, Director of Administration & Communications

David Lee, Director of Music

Laura Mayo, Senior Minister

Jason Steiner, Organist and Associate Director of Music

Raymond Stubblefield, Minister of Congregational Life

Brendon Young, Moores School of Music Artist in Residence

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Covenant Church recognizes the laws of the State of Texas and the rights of its citizens. Consistent with this acknowledgment and with respect for the values of our Church, we also acknowledge that our congregants and visitors seek a safe and comfortable space for worship and celebration. In that spirit, we request that all firearms be left in a secure place outside of the Church. We thank God for providing us with the opportunity to worship together and to continue to respect each other as human beings.