

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/white-notebook-in-close-up-photography-5717421/>; photo credit: Polina Kovaleva

What resolutions have you made for the new year?

<Let them respond>

What drove you to choose those? <Let them respond>

There is a stereotype about resolutions, that after a short time we break them. What keeps you focused on sticking with them? <Let them respond>

Does partnering with others help? How?

<Let them respond>

What drives you to seek and to follow Christ?

<Let them respond>

What keeps you focused on that? <Let them respond>

Do you think partnering with others (beyond just coming to Sunday worship) helps? How?

<Let them respond>

How might you help others within your community with their resolve to seek Christ? <Let them respond>

God gives us signs and encourages us to work together to make God's kingdom more known upon this earth.

Look for the opportunities and strive toward that goal this year and always, that you, your community, and the whole world may be blessed for it.

Gospel lesson

Listen now to a story of those who kept their resolve and were blessed to be a blessing for it:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/wise-men/>

Matthew 2:1-12

NRSV

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

²asking, "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."

³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;

⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶'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.'

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

⁸ 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."

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

¹¹ 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.

¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "We Three Kings">

UMH #254>

Message: New Year's Day



Foreground picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-of-the-dark-and-the-light/new-years-day-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/new-years-day-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Precious Lord who continually guides us to you,
 as we take time now to further consider today's
 scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may remain steadfast in our resolve to seek
 and follow You. Amen.

Christ is born! Yet the world still needs to hear, to
 see this gift of love in our midst. We conclude the
 Christmas sermon series with that in mind.



picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-of-the-dark-and-the-light/new-years-day-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/new-years-day-year-a-graphics>

“Let us lift up the name of Jesus today; let us
 make our pledge and follow his star. Let us be
 about the one who guides us, who finds us even
 when we are lost and gives us direction and hope.
 Let our worship be full of songs of praise of the
 name of Jesus, and let our prayers be prayers of
 commitment to follow.”

Have you ever gotten an idea that you just had to follow through, even though you were not sure where it would take you?

I had one recently for a cross stitch piece. I know a person online who does digital art, and he was doing different animal designs.



picture from
<https://www.redbubble.com/people/KipeArtworks/shop>;
credit: Spencer Kipe

I asked him if he could do a goat that I could convert into a cross stitch piece. Because I asked, he did one, and I became his first customer. His business picked up after that, possibly because of confidence gained with a sale and looking at other ways to merchandize his art.

In the meanwhile, Dawn's goat Arthur died.



picture from MMMS collection

My heart went out to her, and I thought of a picture I had of Arthur getting into my car. Instead of using the generic goat picture, I decided to try converting the photo to a cross stitch piece instead.

I am really not that good at converting live photos because too much shading is involved - I do much better with bold, simple colors. I limited my attempt

to Art's head with no background, in a small pattern.



pictures from <https://www.redbubble.com/people/KipeArtworks/shop>, credit: Spencer Kipe; MMMS collection; and DSW collection; respectively

When done, I put it in a 3x5 refrigerator magnet frame and gave it to Dawn; I think she likes the keepsake reminder of her treasured animal. It came out close enough that I felt blessed to have accomplished the project laid upon my heart.

I wonder if that is sort of how the wise men felt when they returned from seeing Jesus.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/wise-men/>

They saw a star in the sky and thought, *This is special; we need to see what is there!* even though they did not know where their travels would take them.

They went to King Herod, thinking that the seat of the Jewish kingdom would be where the Messiah was. In telling Herod about it, they gave him the opportunity to honor God. However, instead of being encouraged about the kingdom, Herod fell prey to sinful insecurities and political scheming.

The wise men were redirected to Bethlehem, where the

true King had been born. Following the star, they found Jesus and gave the infant kingly gifts. Although the gift-giving did not have the political boon they might have expected, they felt blessed to have accomplished the task laid upon their hearts.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about how the mystery of Christ was unknown to the world before Jesus came. This is supported by comments by Isaiah about darkness covering the earth and in the psalmist's mention of oppressors and the need for justice.

The world needs to hear about God's grace, and Paul was called so strongly to tell about it that he describes himself as a prisoner for Christ Jesus. Yet the work itself, he calls grace given to him - a blessing, a sharing of the boundless riches of Christ. He did not know exactly what he was getting into or where it would take him (to Gentiles, not Jews!) when he answered Jesus's call, but he received life fulfillment from it.

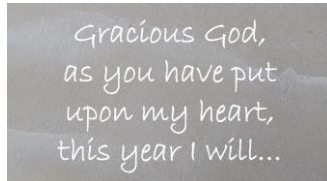
So what about you? What do you resolve to do for Jesus this new year? What is God calling your heart to pursue, to share news of God's kingdom with all?

† Are you called to follow the star more closely with daily Bible studies, meditations, and prayer, that God's light may shine more brightly in you?

† Are you called to serve others in some way that

touches their hearts and leads them to seek Christ for themselves?

- † Are you called to thwart sinful schemes through faithfulness to God, providing love that stops the sin in its tracks?



picture from MMMS collection

Whatever your resolution, I invite you:

<Georgetown> to write it on one of the papers in the pews, bring it forward when you come for communion, and put it in the baptismal font as a dedication to God for something new in your faith journey this year.

<South Otselic> when you come up for communion, to take one of the blue or white ribbons from the little table, write your resolution on it, and add it to the blue Christmas tree as a dedication to God for something new for your faith journey in the world still struggling with darkness this year.

<Invitation

UMH p.7>

We know that Christ our Lord invites to His table all who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.

Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

<slide change>

<Confession and Pardon

UMH p.8>

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you
with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray.

Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Glory to God. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of glorious surprises:

Like the wise men sent by Herod, we, too, come as
searchers for a glimpse of your presence.

As were the people in those days, we are surprised
that we find you not in a palace but in a stable,
surrounded by a family of poor refugees and
worshiped by the lowly shepherds.

Like them, our gifts from our wealth seem simultaneously too material and woefully shabby and outshined by what you have given us.

Just the same, use our gifts for the work of justice, mercy, and compassion—as would befit the Savior who sleeps in a manger.

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- *<Georgetown - bless mittens/scarves/etc.>*
- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
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- Thanks for
 - -
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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems

- end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
- bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray in Your holy name, Amen.

<THE GREAT THANKSGIVING Communion – UNCOVER elements>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

- † Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth, from everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God.
- † You created light out of darkness and brought forth light on the earth.
- † You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
- † When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

† You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ,
in whom you have revealed yourself, our light and
our salvation.

You sent a star to guide wise men to where the Christ was born; and in your signs and witnesses, in every age and through all the world, you have led your people from far places to his light.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

<hold hands out over bread/elements>

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

<hold hands out over juice/elements>

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

<slide change>

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

<hold hands out over elements>

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on
on these gifts of bread and juice.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each
other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at
his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit
in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours,
almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

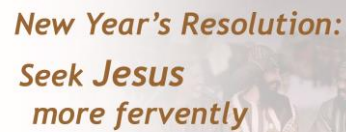
And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
let us pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup>

<Serving of the elements/music background>

<Hymn "O Come, ALL Ye Faithful" UMH #234>

<Benediction>



*New Year's Resolution:
Seek Jesus
more fervently*

background picture from
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-of-the-dark-and-the-light/new-years-day-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/new-years-day-year-a-graphics>

We have good news of great joy to share!
Go now resolved to see more clearly for yourself and
to guide the world to learn through your love and
actions what the angels proclaimed:
Our Savior is born! He is here! Alleluia and Amen!