

The Olive Branch

January 7, 2026

Accent on Worship

Jim Bargmann

"...magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east...'"
- Matthew 2:1b-2a

I have loved astronomy for as long as I have conscious memory. As a young child, I remember being fascinated by the constellation Orion, the seemingly ever-present belt of stars and its nebula, thought by scientists to be a nursery for new stars. I have vivid memories of reading astronomy magazines and sitting on our back deck, finding new celestial objects with our telescope. Growing up in Colorado with thin air and high altitude, it didn't take much of a trip to find a place where we could see millions of stars and the glowing band of our own Milky Way galaxy. These astonishing views led me to a new appreciation of God's promise to Abram and Sarai, "'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then [God] said... 'So shall your descendants be.'" Even to this day, this story is a reminder of God's faithfulness in keeping promises, even if they seem slow to come by human standards.

And this week, a star again plays a prominent role in the story of God's work.

In this story, there are all of the prominent and powerful and important connections we revisit each Epiphany. But as I write this, I find myself resonating with the connection between God and history and science.

Dr. Paul Maier (1930-2025), former historian and pastor, hypothesized in his book, *First Christmas*, that the star could have

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Sunday Readings

January 11, 2026

*Baptism of Our Lord
year A*

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 14:12-20

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:1-18

January 11, 2026

*Second Sunday after Epiphany
year A*

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

*In the
presence of God.
Being the
presence of God.*

Accent on Worship, *continued from page 1*

actually been the progression of three astronomical events, a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7-6 BCE, the appearance of comet Williams 52 in 5 BCE and a nova recorded in history in 4 BCE, the first sending the message that a king was to be born in Palestine, the second leading them on their journey, and the third confirming their arrival in Jerusalem and marking their communication with Herod - and giving us the stereotypical bright star of Christmas and Epiphany.

Of course, we don't know if any of this is what really occurred. But what we do know is that our faith and the story of God's interaction with humanity exists within reality - within a historical, cultural, scientific, reality - not apart from those things. Faith and history and science and culture are not disconnected from one another but integral parts of one another.

Focusing specifically on the science of nature here, if we assume that Maier's hypotheses about the reality of the Epiphany star are correct, what can we learn here? Some very important things, I would argue:

God and Nature Interact: God and God's creation have interacted with one another throughout history. God's interaction with creation did not stop with the act of creating. The Psalms are full of examples of God's people recording the importance of God's interaction with nature.

Nature is Due Respect and Honor: Nature is due a level of respect, honor as holy, set apart for a Godly purpose. Our indigenous siblings understand this far better than many of us and we would be wise to learn from their wisdom.

Care for Creation: We have been given the task to care for God's handiwork in nature. If we understand nature to be not only the handiwork of God, but also a vital part of our everyday lives and a vehicle by which God continues to work, why would we not care for that very thing?

Creation as Messenger: Whether God manipulated creation to send a message early in Jesus' life or God's unfathomable foreknowledge of how nature would behave based on the very laws God put in place is really not important here - a vitally important message was communicated from God to humans through nature.

What other messages might God be sending through creation and are we listening, observing, learning, and then acting on what we learn as did the magi?

The lessons of God's interaction with creation - including us - are important and meaningful. Let us, like the magi of some 2000 years ago and our indigenous siblings today, learn to respect, honor, care for, and listen to God's handiwork.

- Jim Bargmann

Calendar

Wednesday, January 7

10:00 am Staff meeting
5:30 pm Children's Choir supper
6:00 pm Children's Choir rehearsals
7:00 pm Cantorei rehearsal
7:00 pm Y3 Confirmation

Thursday, January 8

9:30 am Morning Prayer
7:00 pm Vestry meeting
7:00 pm Narcotics Anonymous

Friday, January 9

7:00 pm Recovery group

Saturday, January 10

10:00 am Book Discussion group

Sunday, January 11 - Baptism of Our Lord

8:00 am Holy Eucharist, followed coffee and conversation
9:30 pm Godly Play / Youth Discussion / Adult Forum
10:45 am Holy Eucharist, followed coffee and conversation
12:30 pm Y1 Confirmation

Monday, January 12

5:30 p.m. Family Music Time (online only)
7:00 pm Monday Night WAVE (N.A.)

Tuesday, January 13

Noon Bible Study

Tuesday Noon Bible Study Link

The Tuesday Noon Bible Study meets weekly in person in the East Assembly Room. For those who are unable to come in person, the Bible Study is held over Zoom as well.

The link for the Tuesday noon Bible study will be the same every week. To join from your computer, tablet, or smartphone, [click here](#).

Book Discussion

For the first session of the new year on January 10, the group will consider an author new to the group, Niall Williams, as we read *Time of the Child*. On February 14 we'll take one of our rare trips into nonfiction as we read *A Terrible Glory: Custer and the Little Bighorn - The Last Great Battle of the American West*, by James Donivan.

Everyone is invited to join when-ever you are able, at 10 a.m. in the Library, usually on the second Saturday of each month. The group has been using Zoom to provide remote access to the sessions. If you would like to participate in the group, you can either attend the monthly sessions which meet at the church in person or join remotely via Zoom. To join from your computer, tablet, or smart phone, [click here](#).

Thank you, thank you!

Many thanks to the people of Mount Olive for the generous Christmas gifts and cards we received, and for all your kindness and support throughout the year! You are Christ to us in so many ways, and we are deeply grateful for you in our lives.

Blessings and peace to you all in this new year in God's care!

- The staff of Mount Olive: Jim Bargmann, Joseph Crippen, Mari Espeland, Jose Morocho, Erik Nelson, Cha Posz, Bekah Schulz, and Dan Schwandt.

Winter Wear Needed!

This time of year, Neighborhood Ministry is often asked by our neighbors about warm clothes for those who come to get assistance. If you have any coats, jackets, scarves, gloves/mittens/ or hats to donate, please know we can put them to good use. Drop them off in the coat room adjacent to the kitchenette on the upper level. There is an area marked for coat donations. Mittens, gloves, hats, and scarves can be shared in the bins in the coat room. Thank you!

Meal Train!

A meal train has been set up for Elizabeth Manning and Kevin Vasquez (whose daughter, Elena, was recently baptized at Mount Olive) and members of Mount Olive are invited to sign up to support them if you are able. The meal train currently goes through January. Thanks for any support you can provide! Here is the link to the Meal train signup:
<https://mealtrain.com/n90g0d>

2026 Altar Flowers

The 2026 altar flower chart is now available outside the church office. Sign up today to sponsor one or more Sundays! Flowers currently cost \$50/bouquet, \$100 for both. Consider splitting a Sunday with one or more other households to defray the cost or sponsor a full Sunday yourself. Our shared generosity ensures beauty in our liturgies throughout the year.

Thank you.

Simpson Community Shelter and Apartments Community Celebration

Please join us in celebrating the opening of the new Simpson Community Shelter and Apartments **this Saturday, January 10 from 11:00 am to 2:30 pm**. Their beautiful new facility is located at 2740 1st Ave. S. in Minneapolis.

Celebrate the opening of the new Simpson Community Shelter & Apartments. Take a self-guided tour, meet the Simpson staff, learn about our programs and explore ways to get involved at Simpson. Light refreshments will be served.

Simpson Housing is one of our Neighborhood Ministry partner organizations, providing vital services to those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Please plan to join us in celebrating the opening of their new facility.

Singing the Art of Aaron Silver - January 25th — 3pm

In connection with Music & Fine Arts' art exhibit Join Aaron and Rabbi Emma Kippley-Ogman, who will teach you to sing a number of song texts from the papercuts in the exhibit, with song sheets and translations. The more people attend, the more enjoyable it will be as we fill the room with song! Texts we'll sing include:

- I will build this world from love.
- You are not obligated to complete the work, neither are you free to abandon it.
- My God, the soul that you placed in me is pure.
- Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will not fear because you are with me.
- And more!

January Neighborhood Ministries Partner of the Month: *Our Saviour's Community Services*

Our Saviour's Community Services, a non-profit founded by our sister congregation, operates a shelter, which in the last year has served a vital role in providing housing for those experiencing homelessness who have recently been released from the hospital. In addition, they provide transitional housing for women who have experienced domestic abuse and permanent supportive housing for men and women who live with a mental illness, physical disability, and/or substance use disorders. In addition, Mount Olive volunteers provide meals at the Our Saviour's shelter once a month.

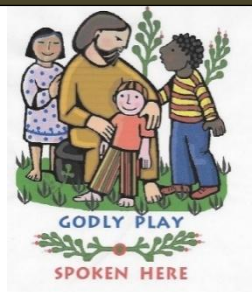
Mount Olive has chosen to support each of our Partners of the Month though a yearly contribution from our budget, and often, like our partner this month, we also volunteer in support of their work. On top of those financial and labor contributions, we encourage any member who wishes to donate over and above our budgeted amount to those partners doing work in their areas of passion and concern. You can do this using your offering envelopes or our online giving system. All additional contributions to our partner of the month will be distributed to the partner for the month in which the contribution is received.

For more information about Our Saviour's work, please visit their website at <https://oscs-mn.org>. For more information about the teams from Mount Olive serving meals at the shelter, contact Elaine Halbardier at ech914@comcast.net.

Godly Play This Week

This Sunday Circle 1 will continue their exploration of Jesus' parables while Circle 2 will think about baptism as we celebrate Jesus' own baptism.

All children ages 3-Grade 1 are welcome to Circle One, and children in grades 2-5 are welcome to Circle Two.



January Adult Forums

January 11 - Lora Dundek, discussing the Minneapolis Area Synod Leipzig Partnership
The Leipzig Partnership is over 30 years old, and both the Minneapolis Area Synod and the Lutheran Church in Leipzig are continuing to explore ways to partner together in ministry and build relationships with each other. Lora will discuss the background of the partnership and how our respective histories can help us build hope and resilience in a challenging world.

January 18 – Greg Murphy and George Heider (possibly others), will provide additional background on Palestine and Mitri Raheb

January 25 - Candy Husemoller, Justice Ministry updates



Standing: Marsha Johnson, Adam Krueger, Carol Martinson, Tim Pipkorn, Andrew Andersen, our Sexton, Jose; **Seated:** Bonnie McLellan, Warren Peterson, Paul Nixdorf, Andrew Stoebig, and Peggy Hoeft.

Thanks to the Decorators!

These folks gathered on a late Advent weekday morning to decorate the Christmas trees for the Christmas season and enjoyed some coffee and fellowship afterwards.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars! **February 8** will be the Taste of Palestine.

The Global Ministry committee hosts a “Taste of” event each year, highlighting our supported ministries. This year we will learn more about Bright Stars of Bethlehem and Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem.

Our Mount Olive travelers who recently went on a partnership trip will present our adult forum on Feb. 8. In addition, there will be a forum preceding the event on Jan. 18. After the second liturgy on February 8, we will gather for a meal of typical food from Palestine, using recipes from Dar al-Kalima University’s culinary education program. Travel team members will also be present to answer questions. Please let Lisa Ruff (global@mountolivechurch.org) know if you are interested in making one of the recipes for the event. We are also looking for people to help with preparing, serving and cleaning up that day.



Layers of History

A journey to Palestine presents a daunting challenge to visitors who hope to gain a basic understanding of the local history and culture of the regions where they travel. The area holds evidence of human settlements going back thousands of years and hundreds of generations and has been under the control of multiple empires due to its strategic location as the crossroads between the Mediterranean, Africa and Asia. For our group, it became a bit of a running joke with our guide, Sami, that many of the churches we toured had been built during the Byzantine period, then destroyed by invading Persians, then rebuilt by Crusaders, and then renovated further during the Ottoman period, usually on the same site. In many cases the various layers of building materials are still clearly visible, as if intended for an archaeological exhibit.



The more modern history of the area also resists simple explanations. A series of decisions from the British government and League of Nations in the early 20th century led to increased migration of Jews to the region and the creation of the state of Israel, while Palestinian Arabs were expelled or forced to leave their homes. The resulting conflicts over control of the region and self-determination for Israeli Jews and Palestinians have now continued for decades, up until this moment.



We have all heard about and seen the heartbreaking images of the ongoing destruction of lives and infrastructure in Gaza, which the UN now considers an act of genocide by Israel. As Christians, as Lutherans who support Bright Stars of Bethlehem and Augusta Victoria Hospital, and as human beings who believe in justice and nonviolence, we are called to “speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.” (Proverbs 31:8)

Tragically, the violence and destruction we have seen in our lifetimes would rival many of the invasions and armed campaigns of the past. But as others have done for centuries, we must continue to support all those who would seek to rebuild new life on the ruins.

~ Greg Murphy

Upper photo: The “White Synagogue,” dating to the late 4th century, stands on the remains of the earlier Synagogue of Jesus in Capernaum.

Lower photo: The Memorial Church of St. Peter (constructed in 1982) was built directly over the ruins of the 5th-century House of Peter in Capernaum.

Mount Olive Lutheran Church

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*A congregation of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America*

Sunday Eucharist: 8 & 10:45 am

Contact Us

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Staff

Pastor - *Joseph Crippen*

Cantor - *Daniel Schwandt*

Vicar - *Erik Nelson*

Administrative Assistant - *Cha Posz*

Coordinator of Neighborhood Ministry

- *Jim Bargmann*

*Mount Olive is a Reconciling in Christ
congregation.*

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