

**Sunday, January 1, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church  
New Year’s Day**

**Bible Study  
Matthew 2:1-12  
“God of the Dark and the Light”**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes)

In groups of two or three, have participants complete the following sentence: “What are you hopeful for this coming year?”

**Matthew 2:1-12, Context.** The 12 days of the Christmas season precede the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6. This feast celebrates the Revelation (= Epiphany) to the Gentiles, that is, to the peoples who are not Jews. Only Matthew tells the story of the "wise men from the East" or magi, who would have been astrologers living in the Persian Empire. Only Matthew tells us about the role of King Herod, and reminds us that Jesus' birth was surrounded by darkness and danger. To the gifts of gold and frankincense that we read of in Isaiah, is added the gift of myrrh, a precious anointment frequently used in preparing bodies for burial.

**Read Matthew 2:1-12**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

**Read Matthew 2:1-12**

**Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.**

- Read over the Wesley Covenant Prayer (and any other aspects of the Wesley Covenant Service in bold) in the Invitation section of the service at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship/covenant-renewal-service>.
- How many “wise men” does Matthew say visited the holy family?

- What might the significance be of “wise men from the East” being some of the first to worship (pay him homage in 2:11) Jesus? What might this foreshadow? [This foreshadows the inclusion of Gentiles (non-Jews) into the covenant people.]
- January 6 is recognized as the Day of Epiphany. What does it mean to have an epiphany? How do the “wise men” experience an epiphany (or epiphanies) in this story?
- How might we experience an epiphany in keeping a covenant?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God who surprises us, help us to be surprised by an encounter with you. Keep us attentive to your presence as we go about our week. Help us live to keep our covenant with you and our church family. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
     hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
     on earth as it is in Heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
     as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 Lead us not into temptation  
     but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom, the power  
     and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.