

# The Ascent

JANUARY 2025

ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



## Stepping into the Light

# Stepping Into the Light



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**T**he light still shines. As the church moves from the season of Christmas into Epiphany, January 6th and beyond, this is the fundamental truth that we hold. Even as Christmas trees are taken down, and Christmas lights are extinguished, we rejoice that Christ's light has been and continues to shine forth over all the earth and into our lives.

## For the Nations

This reality is displayed in the Bible through the story of the magi. In the Gospel of Matthew, the magi are described as coming from the east and represent the various people of the earth from beyond Israel being drawn to the revealing (epiphany) of God in Jesus Christ. Their coming is linked to the hope articulated in Isaiah 60, "*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*"

There is a particular emphasis on mission in the season of Epiphany. We are reminded of how the light of Christ is shining forth in every nation and of the ways that we are called to participate in reflecting the light of Jesus. This is done both in word and deed, across oceans and cultures, and in the context of our everyday vocations and homes.

## For Us

In his "Sonnet for Epiphany," poet-priest Malcolm Guite writes of the magi who met Jesus, "*When these three arrive they bring us with them.*" What might have been only for others is for us. Because of what God has done, we are included in the life of God, able to stand where we would not belong on our own. Unto us, Jesus, The Light, has been given.

Even as the light of Christ shines out across the earth, Epiphany represents an opportunity for us to live more fully in the light personally - to have our hearts, minds, and whole being illuminated by the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus.



This prayer, by the former Anglican Archbishop William Temple and included in the Book of Common Prayer, expresses this intention. *“Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you, and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”*

## Reflecting Light

To be a follower of Christ is to be invited to participate in reflecting God’s glory. We can have a part in making Jesus’ light known. The light of Christ can also further illuminate and warm our own lives. However far along we are in life with Jesus, there is still more light to be shed upon us.

These two truths are linked, as Temple’s prayer indicates. As the light of Christ increasingly illuminates us, we more fully reflect that light to the world around us. As we become increasingly acquainted with the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus, exposed to the light He is, we become the kind of people who can *“kick at the darkness ‘til it bleeds daylight,”* as Bruce Cockburn sang.

This Epiphany, and at all times, the light of Christ is shining forth. Be encouraged to bask in this glow and allow the light of Christ to saturate your heart, mind, and your whole life. As you do so, through prayer, worship, and meeting God in Scripture, you will invariably come to reflect and participate further in the shining forth of His glory.

## Stepping into the Light

In line with this season and its theme of light shining, a few specific things are happening at Ascension over the coming months.

**First**, we are starting several community book groups in January and February. Additionally, several gatherings are scheduled for men and women respectively, and for the

whole church. These represent an opportunity to illuminate our minds and live more fully in the light.

**Second**, supplies will be available on the first Sundays of this season for “chalking the doors” of our homes. This is an annual practice for many Christians and involves inviting Christ’s presence into our homes so that they might be havens of blessing and peace for ourselves and our neighbors. Keep an eye out for these supplies and commission your home as an outpost of the light. More on this to come!

**Third**, in relation to “chalking the doors,” it is customary to bless homes during the Epiphany season. If you would like a clergy person to come and pray with you for your home, there is a way to register for this on the Church Center app. While these blessings are most often done in relation to moving into a new home, if you have never had this blessing or feel the need for it again, be encouraged to sign up.

**Fourth**, sermons this season will all be drawn from the Gospel of Luke, focusing upon Jesus’ glory, the world’s light. The penultimate Sunday of this season, February 24th, is focused on world missions. We will rejoice in the truth of Christ’s light going forth to the nations and the ways we have been blessed to participate in that work locally and globally.

Early in the Gospel of John, it is declared that the “light shines in the darkness and is not overcome.” May this Epiphany be an opportunity for us to grow in conviction of this reality. Even in the dark and uncertain times, the light shines forth to the nations and for us.

# Epiphany Formation Opportunities



By Peter Coelho, Rector

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**I**n his book *Called to Be Saints*, Gordon Smith identifies the church as a “venue of transformation,” through which we are changed into the likeness of Jesus. More specifically, he suggests the church must be a community of teaching and learning alongside worship and mission. In light of this vision, Ascension will be experimenting with different offerings related to formation and education in the coming seasons. Our hope is that we together will grow in our apprenticeship to Jesus, our Great Teacher.

Over the coming months there will be different book group offerings touching on the topics of hospitality, prayer, parenting, and healing conversations regarding race. Additionally, there will be two gatherings of men and women on the topics of friendship and transition. These offerings will come alongside our regular rhythm of worship and life together (Consider joining a community group!). Check out these and other possibilities. We hope you can join in!

## Chalking the Doors

Epiphany commemorates the magi who came from the east bearing gifts and following a star to meet Jesus, the Light of the World and King of all Creation. We celebrate the Epiphany to remember that we also are invited to bear witness to the life of Jesus, pay homage to him as King in the whole of our lives, and receive his blessing at the start of a new year.

“Chalking the door” is a way to celebrate and mark the occasion of Epiphany with God’s blessing of our lives and home. With chalk we mark above our doors the initials of the Latin words, “Christus Mansionem Benedictat” (May Christ bless this house) bracketed by the current year. CMB also corresponds with the names traditionally associated with the wise men: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. Using chalk mark your doorpost, either on the inside or outside, with “20 + C + M + B + 25”.

Small ‘Chalking the Doors’ kits will be available in early Epiphany to take home. Households can also request a House Blessing by contacting one of our clergy.

We also hope the doors to the church will be finished by early Epiphany and, God-willing, we will dedicate them with a special chalking as well!





## Liturgy Spotlight

Beginning Sunday, January 19

One of the many themes at play in the season of Epiphany is the light of Christ shining in a dark world. Throughout this season, we'll feature a series of brief articles entitled "Liturgical Spotlight" to illuminate aspects of the liturgical practices that help us frame our worship as Anglican Christians.

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the architect of the Book of Common Prayer, sought to cultivate Christian society in

16th-century England through the Church. The genius of his work was to ground that vision in the word of God by crafting a prayerbook that is essentially 85% Scripture configured as prayer. It is based on the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, that is the rule of prayer is the rule of faith.

Its language, imagery, phraseology, and poetry are highly memorable, appealing not only to the head but also the heart. Cranmer's daily office lectionary of Morning and Evening Prayer fosters biblical literacy by reading most of the Bible in a year. The Sunday lectionary then rehearses the great acts of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in bringing forth the Kingdom of God into our midst as we celebrate the major feasts of the calendar year.

What is more, the structure of the liturgies emphasizes the Reformation principle of Justification by Faith in the Grace of God "shown to us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8. Cranmer scholar Ashly Null says the lens through which we should read the Book of Common Prayer is that Cranmer wants people to learn to love God more than sin, so that we "will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Roman 8:21.

As we walk through this season, may the liturgy carry you along in greater freedom to worship the Lord in the light of his glory.



## Instructed Eucharist

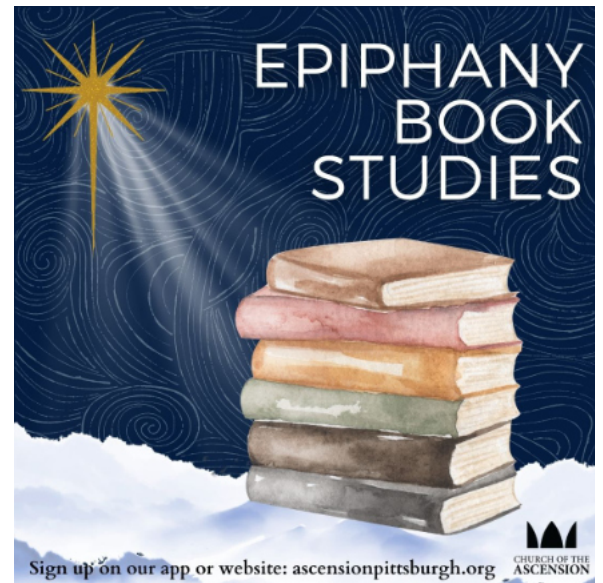
*Sunday, January 19*

Liturgy is not a document, but an enacted, sung, and spoken event in the life of the people of God. On occasion, Anglican congregations celebrate an "Instructed Eucharist," which pauses the elements of the normal service to explain them and remind us of their deep history and meaning. We have many among us who are not Anglican by background. And we have many who might enjoy a liturgical refresher! The services on January 19 will be an opportunity to learn more about the worship we experience every Sunday. Verbal explanations of the parts of the service will be offered throughout.

## Engage through Book Studies

Several book studies will be offered in Epiphany. You may sign up on the website or app. You can choose one, or if you love to read and engage with others, you can choose all! The groups will meet once in person and once via Zoom. The options are as follows:

- *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* by Christina D. Pohl
- *Emmanuel Promise: Discovering the Security of a Life held by God* by Summer Joy Gross
- *Parenting without Panic in an LGBT-Affirming World: Discipling Our Kids with Jesus' Truth and Love (A Christian Parent's Guide to What the Bible Says About Sex, Sexuality, Gender, and Relationships)* by Rachel Gilson
- *Healing Conversations on Race: Four Key Practices from Scripture and Psychology* by Veola Vazquez, Joshua Knabb, Charles Lee-Johnson, Krystal Hays
- *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God* by Justin Brierley



## Table Talk: A New Series!

*Sunday, January 26 after the 11am service*

We are delighted to introduce a new series we're calling 'Table Talk.' Occasionally (hopefully each quarter) we will offer a luncheon after the 11am service, in Bailey Hall, featuring a speaker and a talk. Our first gathering will be the last Sunday of January and will feature our rector, Peter Coelho. We will get to know him better and learn more of his hopes and dreams for Ascension. The talk will be entitled "How did Pentecostal Peter become a Pittsburgh Priest?" We hope you can join us. More details to come!



## Ignatian Experience

*Informational Meeting on Sunday, February 16*

One of the many pathways for spiritual formation available to the Church are the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, a unique and structured practice of prayer, meditation and spiritual direction. Ascension is offering a 10-week adaptation of the exercises beginning on the week of February 24 and concluding the week of April 28. (There is a required orientation meeting on Sunday, February 16). This is an intensive experience that includes individual prayer and meditation on Scripture as well as time spent sharing your experiences within the context of small group spiritual direction. Participants will meet once a week on Monday evenings for the 10 weeks and commit to a daily prayer practice outlined in an Exercises manual.



## Men's Breakfast

*Saturday, February 1*

New this year! A Men's Breakfast. Peter Coelho and Kevin Antlitz will present on the theme of Friendship. If you are new to Ascension (and even if you aren't!), this is a great entry point to the life of Church. Eat great food. Chat with great people. Engage with a challenging talk. A sign-up will be available a few weeks prior to the event.



## Women's Breakfast

*Saturday, March 1*

Once again, we will host a special event for women – this time a breakfast. Tamara Cameron will present on the theme of Transition. As with the men's breakfast, if you are new to Ascension (and even if you aren't!), this is a great entry point to the life of Church of the Ascension. Eat great food. Chat with great people. Engage with a challenging talk. A sign-up will be available a few weeks prior to the event.

# Do You Want to be Confirmed?!



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector

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**C**onfirmation Sunday is June 1, 2025. Sign up for the Foundations course to get prepared.

I have heard Confirmation described as a liturgical rite in search of a theology. This may sound a bit cheeky, but I think there's a grain of truth to it. Unlike most of the other sacraments and rites of the church (e.g., baptism, eucharist, marriage, etc.), the meaning of Confirmation can be a bit fuzzy. In this article, I want to help clarify what Confirmation is and why it's so important.

Doing this, I will highlight four elements of the Rite of Confirmation. These are confession, commitment, commissioning, and communion. I'll quickly unpack each of them.

The first element is confession. Here confession is less about naming your sins and asking for forgiveness and more about publicly declaring certain things. In the rite of Confirmation, confirmands publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ. They confess they have been made God's child by adoption. They confess that they are seeking to follow Jesus Christ in a life of faith and repentance.

The second element is commitment. This is closely tied to confession. In this rite, confirmands can (re)commit themselves to their baptismal vows. To summarize these baptismal promises, the confirmands renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh and turn to Jesus as Lord and savior and joyfully receive the Christian Faith as revealed in the Scriptures and summarized by creeds. As the confirmands publicly confess and commit to keep their baptismal promises, by the grace of God, the congregation is also invited to commit to support them in their life in Christ.

The third element is commissioning. As the Bishop lays hands on the confirmands, they are commissioned to serve Christ and his Church. Although Confirmation is not a sacrament, we

nevertheless believe that something happens in the rite. Specifically, we believe confirmands are empowered afresh by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Just to be very clear: we believe that the Holy Spirit indwells all Christians. But during the rite of Confirmation, we also believe that confirmands receive a fresh anointing and filling of the Spirit to be equipped and empowered for Christian life and mission.

The fourth element of Confirmation is communion. In this rite, confirmands formally align themselves with the Anglican Communion as understood by the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA). This means they are publicly affirming and submitting to the core doctrine and discipline of the ACNA, which includes the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Jerusalem Declaration, and the ACNA Catechism.

There's much more that could be said about the Rite of Confirmation, but I think this is enough to give you a sense of what it is and why it matters.

If you are interested in being confirmed Ascension Sunday (June 1, 2025), I invite you to join me for the six-week Foundations course. We will focus on the foundational things every Christian ought to know including the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and the Ten Commandments. Because we are an Anglican church, we will also have a session on Anglicanism and our understanding of the Sacraments. We will meet on select Thursday evenings from 7 pm - 9 pm during February and March. You can sign up for the Group in Church Center.



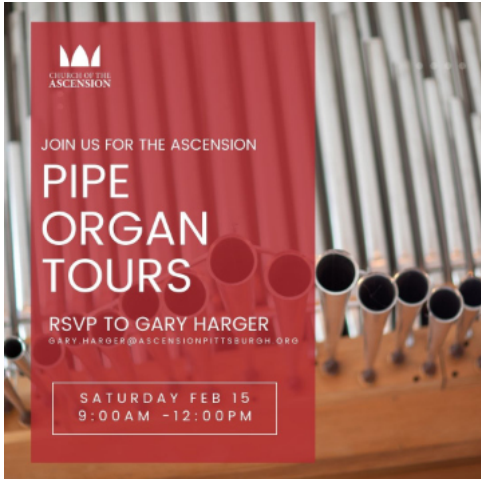


# Music Ministry News



By Gary Harger, Traditional Worship Music Coordinator (Interim)

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## Pipe Organ Tours

*Saturday, February 15 from 9 am -12 pm*

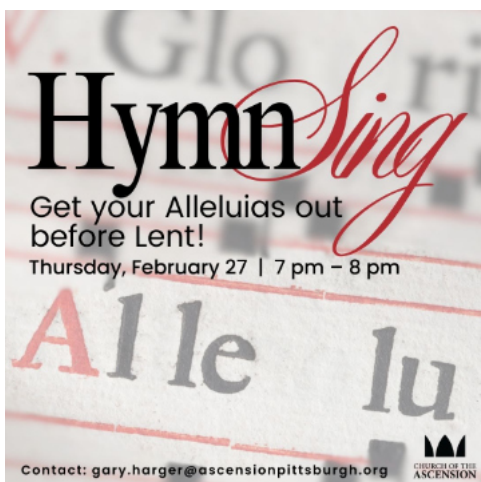
Come learn about the history of our organ, how it works and how it has become an integral part of our worshipping community. You'll also hear about the history of the nave, how worship has changed over the last century and anecdotes about those who once served as organists. There will be three separate tours at 9 am, 10 am and 11 am. Sign up and don't forget to bring some music if you would like to take a turn on the bench. Children and families are welcome. Contact Gary Harger for more information.



## Viola and Piano Recital

*Saturday, February 22 at 4 pm*

Join Stephen and Heidi Mayhew as they present an evening of solos and duets, including music by Bach, Schubert, Vaughn Williams and Muczynski. You won't want to miss this evening of beautiful music by two of our Ascension musicians. A reception to follow in the New Narthex. Contact [heidi.mayhew@ascensionpittsburgh.org](mailto:heidi.mayhew@ascensionpittsburgh.org) for more information.



## Hymn Sing: Get your Alleluias out before Lent!

*Thursday, February 27 from 7 pm - 8 pm*

Come join us in the Nave to sing hymns both ancient and new. We'll sing with the organ, piano and other instruments and sometimes a Capella. Singers of all ages and abilities are welcome! Let's end the season of Epiphany with a joyful time of worship. Contact Gary Harger for more information.

# Join Us! More Info on the App!



ASCENSION INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY  
**ICE SKATING  
 DOWNTOWN  
 PITTSBURGH**  
 Friday January 10, 2025 | 5:00-6:00pm | \$12

## ESL Skating

Join Internationals for chilly skating and warm conversation

**Soul Care**  
 Join us for a quiet morning,  
 Saturdays in Epiphany

A graphic for the Soul Care event. It features a blue background with soft, out-of-focus bokeh lights and pine branches on the sides. The text is centered within a white-bordered box.

## SOUL CARE

*Silent prayer.  
 Scripture reading.  
 Individual reflection.*



SAT. JAN 11, 2025

9:30-11:00AM

**LEGACY  
 SENIORS  
 MINISTRY**  
*"Understanding Jewish  
 Feasts that Jesus Celebrated"*  
 with Cariño Casas  
**THURSDAY | TIME**  
**JAN 16TH | 12:30-2:30PM**



## Legacy Seniors Luncheon

Join other seniors for a luncheon and talk



**Jubilee Weekend**  
 College students, join us for this weekend of fun and challenge

**WINGS Valentines Party**  
 Join us for a fun party with our Special Needs community



**Annual Meeting**  
**SUNDAY MARCH 2**



CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

**Annual Meeting**  
 Join us to hear from our leadership and learn about our church

# Honor Award!



By Marilyn Chislaghi, Director of Ministry  
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**T**he parish hall design was inspired by a shared vision to be a physical beacon of light in our neighborhood, symbolic of the kind of hopeful people we desire to be in the city of Pittsburgh.

The transparency of the new front entrance was deliberate, moving away from a fortress-like structure to one that gestures hospitality to our neighbors by its sheer transparency – you are welcome to come and join us! These are good reminders for us in the season of Epiphany, a season of light. We are so pleased to announce that our architects, Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, were recently presented with an Honor Award for this design by the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Well done!

Worship Services **Sunday 9:00 am, 11:00 am Nave Services** with [YouTube](#) live stream.

Website [www.ascensionpittsburgh.org](http://www.ascensionpittsburgh.org)

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A Worshipping Community;  
Equipping God's People; Sharing  
Christ's Healing with a Broken World