

Matthew 2: 1-12

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "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." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They 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.

During seminary I rented a house with two of my best friends. At Christmas time I would set up the nativity. Except I didn't just set it up the way most normal and sane people do. My guess is that in your homes you take out the nativity pieces gingerly and with much care and arrange them perfectly where you would like to display them. You set out Mary and Joseph and you add the little animals and you put the angels singing their good news of great joy. You add in your shepherd boys and their sheep. And then you add too to the scene the wise men. That is how most people put out the nativity.

Well, friends, we have been together for 3 years now, so I am sure by now you know that I often do not do things the way MOST people would. Which applied to the nativity on our fireplace mantle year in and year out. And as I am sure you can imagine being roommates with a seminarian at Christmas time was, well extra. You see, I insisted that we make the nativity as close to factual as possible. It was super fun for everyone. So I set sweet Mary and Joseph out first way over on the left side of the mantle on December 1st, and they began their trek across our fireplace mantle. No one else got to come out of the box. Day after day I would move them just a little

further on their journey. Ok hold on, Kelley, I am going to need you to work with me here as I tell the rest of the story – you will note that even still in my efforts to be factual that there are some well discrepancies but no one in that house was letting me celebrate a single Christmas for two years, so if you could just smile during the rest of my story that would be great. Anyway, Around the 20th, I let the shepherds join the journey by starting where Mary and Joseph had. On the 24th the Angels suddenly appeared with the Shepherds near the middle of the mantle to announce their good news of great joy that that this day in the city of “Right Side of the Mantle” a baby would be found. And surprise suddenly a baby did appear in a manger. A miraculous birth in its own right as we all prayed that Anna remembered where she put the blessed baby. But that’s not all! Because of course it’s not all! Much to my roommates chagrin the magi figurines would show up and begin their journey about the time everyone wanted to pack up the Christmas decorations. And they too would take their journey across the mantle for the season of Epiphany, the whole nativity scene being the last thing we put away each year. I am so very fun aren't I?

If you haven't figured it out yet, today is Epiphany. Today is the day the Magi follow a star and show up with gifts for the baby – well toddler since today we are getting into the minutia of technicalities.

Every year, we hear the story of Christmas and on it's heels, we hear the story of the magi following a star. Always the last to show up. The wise men traveling from the east. The three gifts they bring the child. 'We Three King of Orient Are'. You know the routine. But has it become SO routine that the story no longer holds meaning ... that the journey of the magi no longer seems real to us ... the brightness of the star, the greatness of their joy, does it still command our attention? Or like my roommates are we ready to just pack it up and be done? Following our Advent season of Stay Awhile what I am wondering this Epiphany is do we still hear the invitation in the story or has that too gotten lost?

Epiphany is one of my favorite days in the year of church life. I love the story of Epiphany. I love the magi who bring science and faith together. I love the Magi who make up their own minds to not listen to Herod. The word Epiphany comes to us almost directly from the Greek. “*Epi*”, meaning ‘on’ or ‘upon’, and “*phaneros*”, which means ‘visible’, or ‘seen’. Epiphany means to “show up, show on, show out”. The star ‘shows up’ so the magi can make their journey and ‘show up’ and find Jesus. The story invites us to show up too. The story sweeps in and reminds us after a season of staying awhile to not be a stranger. To always find our way back – and to always be on the lookout for the ways the Holy is showing up too.

We know, from my recreation of the story on the mantle, ok AND the bible, that it isn't until much later that these Magi show up. Jesus is born long before they get there. It's not like they're in the waiting room. They see the star, and know it has meaning, and go to the seat of power to gain information, they head first to Jerusalem: 'Where is this child?'. And King Herod panics at the threat to his power – after all, isn't HE the king?! – he gathers his advisors, examines the optics, and sends the star followers on their way.

'...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. They found him there, and worshipped, offered their gifts and rejoiced at their finding.

The magi followed a star because that is what they knew. Stars. You know you and me? We know a lot about stars. We see lots of them and sometimes we talk about them without even realizing it.

In an earlier day, one half of our nation referred to their flag as the Stars and Bars. Since then, the *United States'* flag has been known as the Stars and Stripes

We could make a night of it and rest under a blanket of stars.

Head to Vegas and hit it big? Thank your lucky stars.

Before you go, maybe you read your horoscope to see what's in the stars.

Get a little crazy while you're out there, and you may wake up seeing stars.

Go a little farther west and you can get a map to see the homes of movie stars.

And, I don't want you to think I've forgotten the actual literal stars: in wide open country, it's always beautiful to spot the evening star, or to use a telescope and explore the path and patterns of the north star. And several times a year, there are peak nights where an open field and an upward gaze are all you need to see dozens and dozens of shooting stars ...

And who can forget the beloved Disney classic Pinocchio that showed us what could happen When You Wish Upon A Star.

We know a thing or two about stars. But what I always wonder at this time of year is this - Why this star? Why does this one so fascinate us? What is it about this star of wonder, star of light, that drew the magi on a journey to come face to face with Jesus? What does it have to do with us? And perhaps more to the point, why should we have anything to do with it? Of all the stars in all the world, why are we so drawn, time and time again, to this one?

The thing that sticks with me from the story this year isn't just the following of a star which is in and of itself fascinating to me, but is the part of scripture that says that God is revealed when we arrive at the place that the star has stooped. You see, it isn't about the star so much as it is about what is revealed where the star stops. The star in the story of epiphany isn't just a pretty thing, but rather it is a sign of power, and faithfulness, and promise, and constancy, and hope. This story - this good news - points out God's promise of a messiah, one born to and for any who will embark on the journey to see him. The revelation of God was not to be found in the star itself, but in what awaited them at the place it came to rest. The star friends, is the invitation. The star is the sign of welcome.

We are drawn to this star year after year because this star reminds us - it reminds us of something we know but often forget. This star reminds us that God is in the world, revealing and drawing us into love. This star whispers an invitation not just to the Magi but to us as well. This star invites us every year - don't be a stranger it says. Continue to be on this journey looking for the ways in which the Holy, and love, and peace, and hope, and joy are revealed to us. Make your life the journey to find all the places and spaces that the star rests. Come and find God revealed again. Come and be reminded of the wide welcome available to each of us in the kingdom of God. We come back to this star because we just cannot help ourselves. Because where we

must go is as important as where we have been. We follow the star not because we think God is revealed in IT, but because God will be revealed in the journey of following.

The beginning of each new year is filled with expectation and hope. Perhaps this is another reason every year at Epiphany we hear and often accept the invitation to look for the movement of God in our lives, either way this energy of expectation has me wondering where our stars will rest this year. What is to be revealed to us? What needs to be learned? What needs to be let go of? I think there are stars coming to rest all around us all the time revealing something to us.

God is revealed in the star that comes to rest over people in this world who give life to the promises of Jesus.

God is revealed in the star that comes to rest over friends showing up when we are in absolute distress.

God will be revealed in the coming-together of ideas and dollars, hopes and dreams, brick and mortar, to create a community in which all may find room, both physically and spiritually.

God will be revealed in hard work of change.

God is revealed when we show up as our authentic selves.

God is revealed in the kindness of strangers.

God will be revealed in the work of justice.

God will be revealed in a community offers its gifts generously into the community and into the world, through outreach funds, and lunches, through groceries and assistance, through creating safe space for all people... through prayer groups, and yoga, through opportunities for youth and children, and community building events, and through dreams sparking to life every day for deeper and wider service to the people the God of the star calls us to love.

We saw the glimmering edges of that star resting here only a few days ago. As we shared in the wonder and anticipation on Christmas Eve, we also lit candles to embody the light of God in the world. I stood with my one little candle and watched as each of you lit your one little candles. Now, growing up in the church, I've done that a lot of times. And I remember the people that stood with me. But it never ever gets old, it never fails to take my breath away to see us share our light together.

It never gets old – standing among the congregation with a candle. Standing before the congregation with a candle. Literally offering the light to you. It is always a moment where what is revealed to me is love and belonging and hope.

By standing in the community, or at the front, or with someone holding your hand, we can see even the oldest of stories, even the most familiar of stars, with new and enlightened eyes. The magi thousands of years ago knew that what they found at the stars resting spot was something of life-changing importance. Friends, the star invites us to journey to the place where God is revealed. The star beckons us to not be a stranger – to show up again and again and to stay a while longer in the places where God is revealed.

Every year at DCC on Epiphany we draw star words– to remind us, just like the Magi to always be on the journey of finding the places where God is revealed. To not

be a stranger in the journey of looking for the places and spaces where hope, joy, love, and peace are revealed all year long. On each star that is drawn, is a word – a different word for each person (I swear, every one is different), and each of us draws a word at random. It's a paper star so it can rest in your wallet, a journal, tucked into a mirror, clipped to a fridge door, or simply a desk drawer. But the idea is that you will hold on to it for the year. The hope is that you will reflect on it time and again, and you will let it be the reminder to find the places where God is revealing things to you in your life and in the world around you. When we receive communion we will draw words, but I encourage you to let the word be your star to follow for the year. Let this star remind you of the invitation of God to always be present to the ways the Holy is moving in the world.

Full disclosure, the best part of this whole thing is being up here and seeing your faces as you draw your star. Trying to react well to your word, or not react, or to see if you can slide it back into the plate and get lucky and draw another one with a word you like better. You're welcome to share it with those near you, or to keep it to yourself. Whatever you do with the word, I hope you'll reflect on your word throughout your year.

What possibility is out there just waiting to be claimed? How will you see this word in your everyday life? Where will you look for it? Where might it find you? What might this word have to say to you about your life, your hopes, your needs, your ability to do something about the hopes and needs of others? Where on earth – where in the whole wide world that God opens before each of us each day – where will this star lead you?

Look at it. Hold it. Grasp it. Say it to yourself. Press it between your hands. Hold it to your heart. Raise it in offering and prayer. Will you pray with me as we embark on this journey of finding God revealed today:

God of stars and wonders, We ask for courage in this new year. We pray you will journey with us, that we can be those wise souls. We follow the star we have seen since its rising, and await the day it will come to rest over a place with hope, peace, joy, and love. We await that time it will stop, over a place where the one who has promised can be born, can rest, can live. We await the day the star we follow will come to rest over a place in each of us, where Love may be born again today, and tomorrow, and all days to come. And when we see that the star has stopped, may we find that we cannot help but be overwhelmed. We cannot help but rejoice, with exceeding great joy. Amen