

It is the 12th day of Christmas, epiphany–eve. We are about to exit Christmastide, and to enter into Epiphany: a new season of revelation, illumination, and expectation. Now that God has come into the world in Jesus, we are invited to watch, to listen, and in our own unique ways, to bear witness to God’s divine plan, as given through Christ, to play a part in its unfolding and manifestation, in the continuing story of God’s love for and redemption of the world.

At Christmas time, we are acutely aware of the inbreaking of God. We heard from Luke the telling of Jesus’ incarnation and the angels who heralded his birth. And we heard of the Word made flesh, the true light who has come into the world, from the gospel of John.

And today, the story continues in Matthew’s gospel, as told through the journey and example of the Magi, their encounter with Herod, and the ways in which they responded to God’s holy in-breaking into their world.

These Magi — magicians, astrologers, men of wisdom, saw the star. Curious, and drawn by more than its light, they dared to follow it.

One might say that a spirit of wisdom and revelation came upon them. Wisdom that caused them to notice the star, to ponder and discern its meaning, and then to choose their next step— traveling to Jerusalem to find the newborn king.

Matthew tells us that there, they encountered Herod, and posed to him a provocative question, one that is still provocative today:

“where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?”

It was a question that elicited from Herod not curiosity, or wonder, but fear and trepidation. While the wise ones sought out Jesus for good, Herod sought out Jesus for Herod’s own good. You see, Jesus’s birth was a disruption. It disrupted the lives of his parents, of the shepherds, of the wise ones, and the lives of Herod, the scribes and the Pharisees. His birth disrupted **the world**, and the world took notice. It usher in a new political order — for the divine king had broken into the earthly realm and those who saw and honored Jesus as the Messiah were not his own, or insiders, but were first outsiders. It was the shepherds and these Magi who saw in Jesus what the Roman rulers and Jewish religious leaders refused to see or could not see. Curiously interested, and seeking insight and wisdom, they had no experiences of threat, but rather, they experienced overwhelming joy. Perhaps we, like them, want and need to come and see for ourselves. We want to follow that star so that we can experience and understand what God has done and is doing in Jesus.

I think God always invites us to pay attention, curious and to be receptive to God's breaking into our lives in ways that we had not seen or imagined, to notice like the Magi the signs all around us that presence us to God. God speaks to us through stars and in dreams, through scripture, in the advice and wisdom of others, including children. And sometimes, God speaks simply through a random star word received in church.

In your bulletin today, you found a star word. I first introduced Star words to you last epiphany, and wanted to do so again, because each year brings something new and fresh with it; an opportunity to grow in faith. Each star word is gifted to you, to metaphorically shine light upon your path. As you consider it, it may illuminate or make visible something that God wants to speak to you, or that God is inviting you to notice, to see, to ponder.

It is said that a star word finds you. And for some of you, the word you received will resonate right away, while for others of you, it may spark questions, or feel challenging, or maybe even bring some discomfort. And you may reject it or want to gift it to someone else. You might even be tempted to see what words others have received and offer to trade with them.

You see, if we were to pick our own Star Words, our choices would arise out of our own needs and voices. But when we **receive** a star word randomly, we are invited to see it as an invitation from God to hold that word as the sacred mystery it is, and then to explore what it might have to say to us. In this word, we may find a gift there for us, or to be shared with those we love, or maybe with those we struggle to love.

In the example of the Magi, you might ask, "what does my star word ask of me or invite me to? Does it call me to some destination, to come? Does it ask me to explore something? Is it inspiring me into service, or perhaps as I hold this word in its mystery, might the invitation be simply, to Be? (And Yes, I just set your Starword in the context of our mission statement).

Because our mission statement speaks to who we as a community of believers, are and how God calls to us. Rather than begin the new year with resolutions, Jesus invites us to follow the star. If we dare to lean in and trust that our star word might shine light newly on our path, like the shining star in the east, how might this single word inform your journey going forward this year? How might it help you to draw closer to God or aid you in navigating your way?

God has given us a gift, and an invitation in Christ, to come and receive; to behold him in his holy mystery and, if we are willing to notice and allow the signs that God places in front of us to capture our attention and guide us on our way, to be enlightened.

In the words of the author of Ephesians: I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

The Magi followed the star and were forever changed because of it. Sometimes God's dream for humanity seems impossible, and we worry that it may never be actualized. But our faith in Christ, our relationship with God, and the movement of the Spirit within us gives us all we need to persevere, to continue to follow that star, to go forward in hope.