

Matthew 2: 1-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. ² They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

³ When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. ⁴ He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ *You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
because from you will come one who governs,
who will shepherd my people Israel.*”^[a]

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” ⁹ When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

We’re following the Epiphany star for the next 7 weeks; following in the footsteps of those magi who left their lives behind to follow a sign, a star leading them to an unknown place for unknown reasons. They never knew the effects of their faithfulness to their call, but simply followed, one step at a time.

Epiphany, which begins with the journey of the magi, is still a continuation of the Christmas story with its implications playing out in the real world.

3 weeks ago we heard Mary’s song, the Magnificat, that dangerous song of revolution and reversal so threatening that governments have forbidden its public proclamation. In the Magnificat, Mary praises God saying that through the birth of the child she’s carrying, God “has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

Mary understood the child she carried to be God's gift of love incarnate that would set the world right. Not just the spiritual world, but the world of flesh and blood: the powerful and the lowly flesh-and-blood people would find their lives upended because of her son. The lives of the hungry and the rich flesh-and-blood people would never be the same because Jesus was born! Love had moved into the neighborhood. As one writer put it:

The Word became flesh...
 The Idea became Reality
 Thought became Thing
 The Promise became fulfilled
 Unseen became Seen
 Unreachable embraced us
 Unimaginably distant sat down beside us
 Highest become lowest
 Richest become poorest
 Divine became human
 Immortal became mortal
 God became one of us....

That's the story of Christmas that we heard on Christmas Eve and again last Sunday in Scripture and in song; the story of Jesus' birth to a poor, young couple, who had been visited by angels telling them not to be afraid but to trust that God was working through them to bring love and hope to the world in a way that would change everything. They didn't know the implications of the angel's message. They kept the words in their hearts and lived their lives, one day at a time, one step at a time.

Today we hear the story of strangers from the east, wise men or magi, who studied the stars and felt called to follow one in particular to receive some new understanding; some epiphany.

Epiphany **means** 'manifestation' or 'new understanding' or even 'revelation.' When the Magi found the child Jesus, they received new understanding; it was revealed to them who the baby was, that he would be messiah for the whole world; for all people.

An epiphany is more than just a "lightbulb" moment, or an "aha!" moment. An epiphany is something that is *revealed*; *it is given*. It's as if light shines revealing something in a new way. The magi received this epiphany for all of us. They saw God made flesh and saw salvation for all people. But they weren't the **only** ones to

have an epiphany. The apostle Paul wrote about his epiphany. Most of the people in the Bible experienced an epiphany of one sort or another. The history of the church is story after story of people who receive new understanding as gift from God.

Epiphanies **are** gifts, not a once and done event. Epiphanies change lives. The magi went home by another route, their lives were changed for having seen Jesus. Paul's life would never be the same after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Everyone who encounters Jesus has their lives changed forever.

If you feel you've had an epiphany, but your life goes on as before, you might question how much of an epiphany it really was. Because epiphanies aren't about learning something new. They're not just added information. The wise men had been studying star charts, they'd been reading prophecies, so they were prepared when they saw the star. They were equipped to follow it.

While God can reveal Godself in many ways, for the magi, they were present for the epiphany, the revelation of Jesus as savior of the world, because they'd been preparing for it and because they had eyes open to see it and hearts willing to make the necessary journey.

If looking at star charts was all they did, they wouldn't have seen Jesus. They had to leave their study and go on a journey. Studying the Word prepares us to go out and encounter the Word in the world. We're guided by the one who wants us to know love incarnate **in the world**. And we're together on this journey with all those God calls, all of us here and those throughout the world attentive to what God is revealing, studying to be prepared for what God will reveal in our lives and in the world and how we might be a part of that.

Attentiveness might be the word of the season. How can we be **attentive** to what God has revealed in the Word, in Jesus and what God **continues** to reveal in our world to those who have ears to hear and a heart to follow together as God's people?

To help us with attentiveness this year, everyone is invited to receive a gift of a star with a word on it from this basket as you come forward for Lord's Supper. That is your starword for the coming year. I invite you to consider how that word might speak to your life in this new year. You might use it to lead your prayers this year or you could tape your star to your refrigerator or bathroom mirror. When you see

it, ask God to prepare you so that the Divine may be revealed to you, wherever your journey may take you.

It's a word to aid your attentiveness; to help guide you this year as you pay attention to what God is revealing to you as you reflect, and pray about it. As you do that, let God use this word and these people to guide you on this year's journey. The magi followed the Epiphany star and found the son of God so that the whole world would know what God had done. What will God reveal to us in our journey this year?

Please join me in this prayer for Epiphany gifts:

God, we acknowledge that we are not always ready to receive your best gifts for us. We receive this epiphany word in order that we might be attentive to what you want us to **know** and to **have** and to **be** in this abundant life following Jesus.

It is often our habit to turn away from or even reject experiences and encounters that we later understand to have been precious gifts.

Help us to be open to the gift that you offer us now through our star words and the epiphanies they may lead us to. We acknowledge that we do not fully understand what this word might mean for our faith, but we receive it from you with gratitude and pray that your Spirit will enable us to live into our word one step at a time.

Amen.