

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

God's promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king. Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, "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." ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They 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.'"

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then 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." ⁹When 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. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On 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. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The new year 2019 has a week nearly finished. Finally, in the church observance, the Magi arrive to the Christ child. These wise men arrive after the Christmas event, not the 12 days of Christmas, but likely a good period of time from when the shepherds came to visit a newborn in a stable. As we know from Christmas pageants, as we know from celebrating a Christmas or two, as we know from the Bible itself, the star is the symbol of this day. It is the symbol of Epiphany. The star was the star of the moment if you will. The star was the focusing point for these unknown figures of the Christmas – Epiphany seasons. The star, as the focal point, led them to Jesus. This morning, on the 6th of January 2019, what are our focusing viewpoints? What type of stars are we chasing?

So, this is a true story. On December 12th of last year, right before Christmas it was a Wednesday night and my wife had her midweek Advent worship service. I thought this would be a good time to perhaps wrap some gifts especially the ones for her. I had bought her, and both my daughters, a luggage weighing device for packing to go on a trip and getting passed the airport with the suitcase under the right weight. When I received the order, the packages had arrived with some other things, so I quickly slipped them into a hidden spot because Karen was about to walk into the room. So, I thought on this night, I will go dig them out and wrap them and have one more thing done. Or so I thought. My challenge became that I thought I knew where I had stashed them, but I was mistaken. I then began a search that lasted for over three hours with some think breaks with Theo. I looked from corner to corner in every niche and in every possible place I could have hidden them, and I simply couldn't remember where they were. It was maddening. In the meantime, I came across a Christmas gift that I had gotten for everyone months before and totally forgot about. To make

matters worse, while I am looking for them, I'm coming across things for me for Christmas that I should not have even seen. I even began to question if I had actually received them from Amazon, and that maybe I had imagined the shipment coming in; but I checked and true enough I had received them a few days before. At last after putting Theo to bed, because of course he and I are together through all this adventure, it finally dawns on me to look in one more a place, and in fact, I discover that's where they were. My searching seemed futile until that ah-ha moment.

Maybe you have had a similar experience with not only a Christmas present, but maybe a cell phone, car keys, glasses, the remote, a wallet or purse, or even a kid! The magi were looking for a kid, a child, as special infant. We do not know if they were lost particularly, but in Matthew's account, it says that they sought out King Herod to ask him if he knew. Of course, this is where we insert the jokes about the other miracle that took place, men actually stopping to ask for directions. The magi were curious. They had devoted this time to find where this mysterious star was leading them. They were in search of a king. I wonder what they thought this king would do?

Sometimes in life we wonder not just the W-O-N-D-E-R word but we wander, W-A-N-D-E-R word. We remember that famous Christmas song: "I wonder as I wander". Sometimes that describes a lot of us as we enter into this new calendar year, as we enter into this new season of Epiphany. The magi certainly wondered and probably wandered, but they did discover the Christ child; we too are wondering, hoping to find the Christ child in our midst as well. In the process of our living, in our attempts to live out our faith, live out our vocation, live out our life's hopeful direction, we sometimes - we follow stars, sometimes we follow people, sometimes we

follow events, but the challenge on this day of Epiphany, and the whole of the Christian life in discipleship is to keep our eyes open for possibility. During the hymn of day this morning following this sermon, the ushers will pass a basket. Each person is asked to reach in, without directly looking as is practical and pull out a star, that has a word on it, just like in the children's sermon. Take the star and put it somewhere as a guide, token, or inspiration word for your life in the faith this year. Now some clarification. The word you are about to receive on this Day of is not a secret formula to some type of success, or a prediction of what's going to happen to you; it is not a horoscope of any type, nor an astrological sign. It is not meant to be magical. What it is meant to be is a word that helps us open our eyes to see where the Holy Spirit may be guiding you in this new year. See how the action of this word reveals itself in ways that apply to your daily living. If we notice the word playing itself out in some way, it is not that something is happening to you because you received this word, more than likely it is that we are more focused on seeing it occur in our midst, much like a prompt. So, if you will, use the word to see God acting in your life through the good and the bad, through the ups and the downs, through the difficult and the easy, through the challenge and the comfort. Some churches that have done this before, have encouraged folks to write down their experiences, some have even shared those experiences with others. If you are so moved, I invite you to consider doing that as well.

Again, your word is not a prophecy of 2019, but it is just one more way to sort of refocus, redirect, and even reset, our own wonderings and wanderings about life in the faith. It helps direct our outlook on issues of living in our household, in our relationships, in our neighborhood, in our workplace, as a citizen of the world, as a baptized person of faith. For

often the challenge of practicing our discipleship is about focusing and refocusing.

The word Epiphany means as sudden manifestation, an illuminating discovery, or grasping a reality in a new way. Throughout this church seasons, the appointed lessons remind us that this baby whose birth we celebrated less than two weeks ago, makes a difference for the world, for the faith, for our lives. We begin to hear, how this infant born Messiah, the Word of God Incarnate, comes to shed light on God's intention for this world, God's hope for this world, and God's love for this world. We hear how this fully human person, Jesus, points to a way that God desires for God's reign. We begin to hear how his baptism, his calling of followers who become his disciples, his interpreting of Scripture, his performing of miracles, his cleansing of the unclean and is a way of point to the inbreaking of God in this world like at no other time before. An inbreaking of God, that continues beyond even the birth of Jesus, to later his teaching, life giving, his empty tomb and his gift of the Holy Spirit. May God give us such epiphanies into his world, realm and direction. Amen.