



**Matthew 2:1-22**

*The Magi Visit the Messiah*

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

*The Escape to Egypt*

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”

*The Return to Nazareth*

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,

WELCOME TO EPIPHANY! My favorite day in the church year. This is an ancient Christian celebration, dating at least as far back as the 300's. Friday, a few days ago, was the actual feast day of Epiphany, which was also, if you count it up, the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas.

This word epiphany comes to us almost directly from the Greek.

"Epi", meaning 'on' or 'upon', and "**phaneros**", which means 'visible', 'apparent' or 'manifest'.

So, an epiphany is more than just a "lightbulb" moment, or an "aha!" moment. An epiphany is something that is *revealed* to you. Something where light shines and makes something clear and manifest.

The magi received this epiphany for all of us. They saw God made flesh and saw salvation for all people.

And the wisemen weren't the only characters in scripture to have epiphanies. The apostle Paul had one, on the road to Damascus. He referred to it as a revelation, where God called him to change his life.

If you have an epiphany, but your life goes on as before, you might question how much of an epiphany it really was. Because epiphanies aren't just learning new things.

It is important to learn new things. Don't get me wrong.

The wise men had been studying the star charts, and had been reading prophecies, so they were prepared when they saw the star, and were equipped to follow it.

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

And while the magi studied and prepared so that they'd be in the right place for the epiphany, they did more than just study. If looking at their star charts was all they did, they wouldn't have seen Jesus. They had to leave their telescopes and go on a journey.

**Studying** the Word prepares you to go out and **encounter** the Word in the world.

And the magi encountered quite a bit. They left Persia and journeyed to Jerusalem. They met King Herod. They went to Bethlehem, where they, like the shepherds in Luke, saw the star stopped over the family and they bowed down and worshiped him. Persian astrologers bowing down before a humble Hebrew baby. Quite a change, I would imagine, from their routine at the university.

But, of course, the epiphany was only the beginning of the changes for the magi. And not all changes are easy. The epiphany of a child born as king in Bethlehem shook the palace in Jerusalem. The world responds when God breaks into the world—and it isn't always peaceful, if you read ahead in the rest of chapter 2. When small men like Herod are afraid.

The magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they left for their own country by another road. But Matthew doesn't say what happened next for the magi.

Did they make it home?

And if they did make it home, what was it like to return to their routine?

Imagine parking your camel in the garage, and walking into the house. Everything looks the same, but you're not, after traveling the world. Your spouse is ready for you to take out the trash and do the other chores they were left with while you traveled, but you've dipped your toes in the Mediterranean! You followed a star and it led you to a child. And you felt God's presence in this baby. You offered your gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to his mother, and you saw the look of confusion in her eyes as she wondered where they were going to put that when they got home.

And you know the world is not the same.

But you feel alone in that knowledge.

Everyone else wants you to return to life as usual.

But you can't.

You've just ridden on a camel for months, fleeing King Herod.

First you thought he was going to kill you. Then you heard the reports and realized he killed the babies. Because of you. Had you not gone to him, asking him where you could worship the king, those babies would still be alive. (I invite you to read the rest of Matthew chapter 2 this week).

Life is NOT "usual", anymore.

This infant God has changed the world, has changed you. And you can't pretend it didn't happen. Epiphany is about God coming to us in ways we can't un-change. We can never see the world again the same way.

We don't know what happened to the magi after they went home by another way, but we do know that once you encounter Jesus, you travel on different roads.

And while they had prepared for their epiphany, and had set out to see it, I bet they didn't expect what actually happened. *Did they?*

Who did they think they'd be giving their royal gifts too?

Had they been looking for Jesus in a small ranch house on a cul-de-sac in Bethlehem, would they have gone to Herod in the palace, seeking a king?

Even when we're seeking God, we rarely seem to find what we expect.

And here's another problem with epiphanies.

They don't always translate.

The magi had to flee King Herod for their lives when he heard the epiphany.

Epiphanies aren't always something you can give to others after you've received them. Sometimes people need to have their own experience of the Divine.

The most the magi could do was tell people what they'd seen.

The most we can do is live our lives reflecting the light of the star that has shined on us, hoping it will shed light for someone who finds themselves in darkness.

Where do you find yourself this Epiphany?

Maybe, like the magi, you've done the work and you're actively seeking God.

Maybe you've already had your epiphany and you know the loneliness of the experience, when others just don't know how it feels to be so different even though you look just the same.

Maybe, like Jerusalem, you're afraid because Herod is afraid. Sometimes the forces that want to keep power where it has been, and want to keep things from changing are strong and scary.

Wherever we are, individually, in the midst of this journey, I'm grateful we are here together to help each other along the way. Wherever you are is okay. We recognize our faith is a personal experience, but that doesn't make it a private one. We don't have to walk this journey alone. One of the reasons we have been pushing a return to in person community is because we're all in different places on this journey and we need each other to help navigate our way through it. We are glad you're here.

I'd like to close with a poem by Ann Weems, called [Star Giving](#).<sup>1</sup>

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas  
is a star...  
Brilliance in a package,  
Something you could keep in the pocket of your jeans  
or in the pocket of your being.  
Something to take out in times of darkness,  
Something that would never snuff out or tarnish,  
Something you could hold in your hand,  
Something for wonderment  
Something for pondering,  
Something that would remind you of  
what Christmas has always meant:  
God's Advent Light into the Darkness of this World.  
But Stars are only God's for giving,  
and I must be content to give you words and wishes  
and packages without stars  
But I can wish you life  
as radiant as the Star  
that announced the Christ Child's coming,  
and as filled with awe as the shepherds who stood  
beneath its light.  
And I can pass on to you the love  
that has been given to me,  
ignited countless times by others  
who have knelt in Bethlehem's light.  
Perhaps, if you ask, God will give you a star.

Epiphanies and stars are only God's to give, but in this church, we have a tradition of passing out star words on Epiphany.

I invite you to consider how that word might speak to your life in this new year. Perhaps you could use it to lead your prayers this year. Perhaps you could tape your star to your refrigerator or bathroom mirror and when you see it, remember to be prepared for the Divine to be revealed to you, wherever your journey may take you.

I am thankful to be on this journey with you and look forward to hearing how God may be revealed to you this year!

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<sup>1</sup> (Poem is found in Ann Weems, "Kneeling in Bethlehem", p. 71 (Westminster John Knox Press)).

