

Matthew 2:1–12

Following a Star – Living in the Light

This Sunday is Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany means revealing, or manifestation, or showing forth. It is the celebration of God revealing God's self in the person of Jesus.

The Magi get mixed into the nativity and the Christmas story but they come months or maybe years after the birth of Jesus. One could say there are only two kings in Matthew's story: King Herod and Jesus, the "king of the Jews." The Magi are not kings but rather "wise ones," scholars who study the stars for signs and omens. They aren't necessarily "three" either. The story mentions three gifts, but doesn't specify the number of people who carry them. These gifts themselves are telling, however: gold for a great king, frankincense for a great priest, and myrrh for one who will suffer and die. When the Magi come or how many there are does not matter as much as what they teach us about our life of faith.

One of Matthew's major themes is that God's salvation extends beyond Jesus' immediate Jewish community to include the Gentiles as well (in other words, to everyone). The visit of the Magi foreshadows this broad message of inclusion, and together with the great commission in Matthew 28:16–20, it frames the story of Jesus' life. Within these two bookends, Matthew's message is clear: not only supposed insiders, but also supposed outsiders are within the great circle of divine love.

In Matthew's story it appears only the Magi notice the star among the thousands of others visible on a clear night. They travel on a long journey from Persia to Bethlehem. The life of faith is also a journey that takes dedication. The Magi gave of themselves to get to Bethlehem. They did not have to go, but they wanted to find out about this star that pierced their imaginations. They had to be studying the stars to be able to see this one star. They had to pay attention to be able to see what God was revealing.

The Magi were not arm chair observers. They acted on what they saw and went on a long, dangerous, dusty, uncomfortable journey. The Magi were looking, hoping, studying, and searching for something they did not have a full understanding about where it would take them. It is hard to find what we are not looking for.

Epiphany comes January 6 every year, at the beginning of a New Year to remind us to pay attention to the star, or sign, or person, or opportunity God is putting in front of us to guide us through the New Year.

We begin the Epiphany season learning about the Magi's declaration of Jesus as a divine person and a King. The story teaches us that Jesus is our King and we should put him first in our life. The Magi could collude with King Herod, but for them Jesus Christ is greater and more powerful than Herod. They endured a long journey from Persia to Bethlehem to meet Jesus, the King. They risked their lives for the sake of Jesus. They rejoiced when they met him. Matthew tells us that they paid Jesus homage, not Herod. Are we willing to put Jesus first in our lives?

This New Year we are invited to reflect on "epiphanies," the ways (great and small) God shows forth in our lives, and the ways (great and small) we notice or overlook those showings.

This Epiphany we are invited to travel the Magi's way; a serving way, a sacrificing way, a giving way, and a loving way. Following a star is never a blind endeavor. The story of these astrologists from the east reminds us that even something as simple as a star in the sky might lead us into places of risk, spaces of courage, and directions that demand trusting hearts. Let's follow their lead.

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob