

Sermon for Jan. 5, 2014

Isa. 60: 1-6

Matt. 2: 1-12

*Lord Jesus, let these words be the light by which you direct each one of us. Amen.*

### Magi Eyes

“Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him’ . . . The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed . . . and they bowed down and worshiped him” (Matt. 2: 2, 9-11).

Stars. Stars. Stars. If there is one thing we can be sure to hear about at Christmastide, it is stars. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men would marvel and stare.” Imagine our response if we saw stars only once in our lifetime. We would be ecstatic, mystified, enraptured, perhaps even frightened, by the power of God. Instead, we go out at night, run our errands, head to the movies or a restaurant, and then turn on the TV, never thinking to glance up. We take the stars’ existence for granted and miss the gift.

Along the line of taking things for granted, I think of a poem by D.H Lawrence called *Mystic*. Using eating an apple as an example of our degree of unawareness, he wrote that most people believe “the only way to eat an apple is to hog it down like a pig,” missing its color, texture, and taste. Lawrence lamented that we have become so mechanical, so unaware of our choices and actions and how they affect our lifestyles, that we miss the experience.

But what do Emerson and Lawrence have to do with our scripture readings or the fact that we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, “Star Sunday,” today? And how many times have we heard the story of these determined magi and their three conveniently symbolic gifts? Do we have any surprise left to experience? What does a centuries’ old feast day have to do with us as we begin a new decade, 2020? All fair questions that should be asked of our scripture lessons; otherwise scripture becomes something rote that no longer causes us to wonder.

So let me begin this first sermon of 2020 by asking you a question. What does the star in our gospel reading, our “good news” reading, this morning signify to you? Think about that for a moment. . . . (Hope. Understanding. Revelation. Direction. Guidance. Love. Fulfillment. Belief. Commitment. Action. Discipline, Wonder, Joy, Mystery, Etc.)

Now let me ask another question. What did this group of scientists and astrologers have to do to follow the star? (Study about it. Research it. Map it. Leave their comfort

zones. Sacrifice. Travel. Take risks. Disobey Herod.) The main thing they had to do was to *stay focused* on the star. The star wasn't something that they could take for granted; it wasn't something that they could glance at now and then to guide them. The star was something that they *could not dare lose sight of* if they wanted to find the Christ Child.

As I reflected on these fellows, I noticed that the one trait they possessed, the one discipline that they practiced, was developing what I call "magi eyes," eyes focused on the star because it would lead them to Christ. I doubt they were born with this ability. Instead, it was a type of vision that they desired to have. And I'm sure things got in the way of that vision—a father pressuring his son not to take up astrology but something more practical, like farming; a wife arguing that a two-year trip to see a baby was ludicrous; a powerful king offering tempting bribes and lies. But these magi apparently had made a commitment to the journey, and together they completed it, worshipped the child, and, we are told, were "overjoyed." Upon finding Christ, they were changed. Transformed. They went home, significantly, "by another way," different from what they had been. This difference did not come from studying *about* the star; it came from *experiencing* the star.

After hearing the Christmas narratives for so many, many years, it is easy, even human, to allow them to become like the stars which we fail to notice that still rise above our heads each night. It is so easy, even human, to allow the surprises of a secular Christmas with each new present to drown out the moving words that Matthew penned centuries ago that still ring out, if we listen, "We saw his star in the east and have come *to worship* him." What we staid and comfortable Christians might want to do in this new year is seek to acquire those same "magi eyes," eyes that stay focused on anything that leads us closer to Christ, eyes that notice the light and determine to follow it. Surely we also would want to avoid those things that deter us from seeking the light: indifference, apathy, poor choices, bad habits, other people's opinions, self-centeredness, intolerance, and a life too filled with us. Like the magi, we would want to surround ourselves with like-minded visionaries who have their eyes focused on the star and a desire to lead us to it, perhaps like the new pastor coming your way. Like the magi, we cannot travel the road to the star alone. We need the vision of one another.

The importance of this Epiphany story is that those who follow the star do indeed find Christ, just as the magi did. They discover that God is not some distant, uncaring being that takes *us* for granted or only peeks down at us every thousand years or so. They find instead that *God's* eyes are always focused on us. The Epiphany of the Lord—the revelation and realization of God's human existence in our world—was not meant for the magi alone, or for the shepherds alone, or for Mary and Joseph alone. The Good News, the reality that Christ walked this earth, that the kingdom is already among us, is also for us. The Good -News is that the Christ-Child didn't take the gold, frankincense, and myrrh and make a run for it, but that he grew up and lived, worked, suffered, and loved

with us on the ordinary and sometimes trying road of life. We are not alone. Love came down at Christmas, and stayed.

Maybe this is the time of year, and the time in our spiritual journeys, when we need to do a bit more stargazing. Maybe what we need this day, as we get back to reality after the holidays, are Magi Eyes, eyes that first know to look for the star, secondly are able to recognize the star, thirdly stay focused on the star no matter where our journeys take us, and fourthly, worship and are changed by the star.

As a gift for you today, and perhaps as a way to stay focused on the Star, we are now each going to receive a Star Word which the ushers will pass out. Please don't peek at each star but simply take one from the plate. The premise is this: the magi followed the star to find the child Jesus, bringing their gifts. We are also seeking Jesus, trusting that God provides many signs (or stars) to guide us closer recognizing him.

On each of the stars is a word, and all the stars have been prayed over, asking God to use them as a means of revelation. I invite you to trust the star that selects you, as a word from God inviting you to think about, ponder, and reflect on throughout this year and see how it might bring you closer to Christ. Some people hang them from a bedside lamp or place them by their computers; others stick them in their coat pockets or toss them. The gift is yours to do with as you want. I pray our star words will lead us home by another way, as different people, followers who come to experience the wonder of having "magi eyes."

Amen.