

Faithful, Fast and Far
Epiphany January 5th 2025
Matthew 2: 1-12
CONKLIN

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky.*

My mom taught me to wish on the first star you saw at night. My dad, as an astrophysicist; revised the jingle for his little girl: *Twinkle, twinkle, little star. Now I know just what you are. A great big ball of incandescent gas, Condensing to a solid mass.*

Today is the second Sunday of Christmas, the first Sunday of the New Year. . Stores might be hawking the Valentine's candy already, but as far as Church is concerned, those twelve days aren't over until January 6th. We look back in gratitude and forward in grace. No matter what happened or didn't happen—we survived.

It's also start of a new liturgical season, carrying us through to Lent. The color for Epiphany is "green" representing growth. We remember, reflect upon and renew the covenant God has made with us. How many times does that coincide with the sacrament of Holy Communion?

To have an "epiphany" is to gain new insight or understanding. Epiphany comes from two Greek words that translate as "the light shows forth" or "the light comes to." Epiphany is often known as the "season of the star". The star is a symbol of light; the Light that God gave us in Jesus and the Light God continues to give. The word "epiphany" means "revelation". We saw God in the manger. Where will God come to us next?

In Matthew's story, the Christ event is a quiet affair. There is no multitude of heavenly hosts, no flocks of shepherds crowding into a barn out behind the inn. It's just Mary and Joseph and a bunch of dreams. At least until chapter two. In chapter two, the

doors get blown open. The wise men from the East show up and turn everything upside down.ⁱ

In the time of Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star in the East and have come to pay him homage."

This is a story of seeking and searching. The Wise Men are looking for something, not sure of their route, their destination or what they'll find.

But.... They're willing to risk going. They move boldly into the unknown pulled by something they can't fully explain. Maybe you can relate to that? Looking for something beyond ourselves. Longing for a life that counts for something. Yearning to make a difference. Whether we admit it or not, deep inside us is a thirst to connect with something holy and transcendent, something that gives us meaning and purpose—something more than making a living or just getting through the day.

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him."

That's pretty much all the Bible tells us. Tradition, legend and imagination added names, nationalities, races and ages. We assume "three" though Matthew never gives a number. We call them "kings". More likely they were "magi"; priests and astrologer-magicians who interpreted signs and dreams. Legends have them all from separate countries, and one old, one middle-aged, and one relatively young. They have symbolic names: Gaspar means, "white", Melchior, "light" and Balthazar means, "the lord of the treasury."

What most important about them is that unlike the other main characters of the Nativity story; they're Gentiles (non-

Jews). We don't know where these guys come from, to be honest. Scholars speculate that they may have come from Persia (Iran), Babylon (Iraq), or even further east-Asia, or who knows? Matthew's point is that those paying attention are the foreigners, the strangers.

By including them Matthew reminds us that Jesus came for all. He was born in a particular place, in a particular time to a particular people... but he's God's gift for all people. No one—no nation, religion, or people—have a monopoly on God's love.

A family brought out their nativity set early in December. Their two-year-old was thrilled by the process of unwrapping the various pieces. Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus and the kings. The one shepherd carrying a small lamb, and another playing the flute. The donkey and the cow. The angel. His parents set it up and moved on to other tasks.

The next day passing by the crèche, they noted a striking change. Their child had gone through the house and collected all his favorite figures—the busload of Fisher-Price people, the clown, the bears, the dinosaur, and the irascible Donald Duck. He'd put them all in the stable. The circle was spread wide and then wider.

The Wise Men model God's inclusive love. They also model faith. Perseverance. Courage. They could have counted the cost of the journey and found it too much. They might have discounted the sign God sent them. They might have chosen the comfort of what they knew to the dangers of the unknown. They could have "wished" for something new and wonderful to happen and never risked claiming it. They got up and went. That's what faith filled people do. They searched. They saw. They believed. They acted.

As it happens the Wise Men wind up about nine miles away from where they want to be. They don't arrive at Jesus' stable but at Herod's palace. Like the Magi we have a choice. We can decide we've had enough of traveling and give our treasure to

Herod. We can make ourselves comfortable enjoying the power, the wealth and the lifestyle that Herod represents. We can stop looking for anything more.

A significant part of what makes them “wise” men is that they didn’t stay with Herod. Nor did they listen to him. They continued until they found the One for whom they were looking. Then they changed directions. They went back by “another road”. As we enter this New Year, so can we.

Bishop William Willimon tells of a time when he took his children on a fishing trip. They were looking for a special place on a certain stream in North Carolina. Following directions they’d been given to the spot they turned down one country road after another. He began to wonder where they were going and if they’d ever find their way home again.

“We’re on quite a journey”, he said to the children.

“No”, corrected one of them from the back seat. “We’re on an adventure.”

“What’s the difference?” asked Willimon. The child explained. “Well, a journey is when you know where you’re going. An adventure is when you don’t know where you’re going but you go anyway.”

Rev Dr. Faith Conklin writes: ***The invitation to the Christian life is an invitation to an adventure.*** *Some persons think that once they’ve found Jesus it’s the end of their search. “I’ve found it. That settles it.” Finding Jesus may be the end of a journey. It’s the beginning of an adventure. It opens new doors, raises new questions and offers new possibilities. Finding Jesus doesn’t mean we can settle down comfortably where we are. It means knowing that wherever the path leads we’ll never walk it alone.*

The old saying tells us; if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together. Epiphany invites us to adventure. It reminds us that God does send signs to guide us along the way.

Call it dreams, visions, nudges, warnings, or restless yearnings; God **is** revealed in our lives.

I close with this story from a pastor about a being invited to a spectacular live Nativity in town: *At one point during the presentation of the Christ Child and the various visitors had made their way to the manger and the angels had danced, I found myself with tears in my eyes. This time, I was not in charge of the service, so I was free to acknowledge that my heart longed to worship the child. We are created with this need to worship, or to pay homage, as the wise men say in our passage. That is what brought the wise men so far, however far it was. That was why they went to Herod and anyone who might help them find their way. They longed to worship, as do we all.*

That is one of the things we forget to pay attention to, our need to worship. It's not just a need, but a longing, a deep longing that nothing else will fill. We are incomplete without it; we are missing something of significance. Epiphany is an opportunity to fill that void, to make us whole.

*Venite Adoremus – come and worship. That is the invitation of the wise men. That is the prophecy from Isaiah. That is the meaning of Epiphany. That is the gift of God. Come and worship. Come and meet your heart's desire. Come and be made whole.*ⁱⁱ

Come and worship. Come all ye faith. Come together right now. The road takes us on an adventure toward Christ.

ⁱ [Discipleship Ministries | Second Sunday after Christmas Day /...](#)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/re-membering-the-body/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-after-christmas-day-epiphany-year-c-preaching-notes>