

**“Trusting God’s Star”**  
**The Epiphany of Our Lord – January 6, 2019 – Matthew 2:1-12/C**

**There is a strange juxtaposition all around us today.** While the “12 Days of Christmas” concluded last night - when all trees and decorations are to be packed and put away – today, we mark the arrival of The Wise Ones from the East. After all their travel and some travail, the Wise Ones came to Bethlehem to see this New Thing – a child – a King. But if we have adhered to 12<sup>th</sup> Night Christmas cleansing, there is no manger scene waiting for them to visit. Jesus has been packed up and put away! So let’s just leave the story open 1 more day: The Day of Epiphany. Then we can settle in for the next 8 weeks to hear stories of how God was revealed in the man, Jesus. We will travel far and wide for those stories, but today we journey with a caravan from the East – to learn some new things as we travel, asking questions and wondering about things that pique our curiosity.

**First, we will see that Christmas is mostly Mary’s story from Luke, chapter 2.** Moving into Epiphany Season we will complete that story from Matthew, which I like to describe as Joseph’s story. Together these two Gospels give us the whole manger scene and a complete Christmas narrative. But in reality, **Luke** has shepherds, angels but no Wise Men, for his themes are about fulfilling Hebrew scripture and the inclusive nature of God’s reach to all humanity. While **Matthew** is filled with dreams, King Herod, and Wise Ones from the East. His themes include political struggles, power and status.

There are a lot of legends around these visitors from the East. Were there 3? We don’t know. But we assume, because there are three gifts brought. Were they Kings? We don’t know. Probably more likely astrologers or astronomers, these Magi. And their traditional names? It is legend that gives them Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, which fits well, especially for Matthew’s audience of Jewish Christians and increasingly, Gentiles. Over the centuries these Wise Ones became three separate ethnicities – symbols of all known continents: Africa, Asia and Europe – who all came to pay homage to the Christ child. Not just Jews. But the whole world fleeing darkness.

**So, here’s my first “wondering.”** What is it about the stillness, the darkness, that God chooses as the best time for new things: Creation itself - the Incarnation of God in flesh - the Resurrection from the dead. God just loves to work in the atmosphere most of us avoid: silence and darkness. But so many beautiful new things happen in Scripture, at night: Jesus’ story happened at night – as did the embarkation of our travelers - under cover of darkness – when the stars come out - the time between sundown and sunrise.

**My second learning is about the Star of Bethlehem, which I have been researching.** Was the Star of Bethlehem a comet, a supernovae or a planetary convergence? While many theories exist, suffice it to say that nobody really knows how a star rises – then travels slowly enough across the sky that a camel caravan can *follow* for a journey of about two years – then recalculates like a modern GPS when the Wise Ones unwisely *assume* their destination is the great city of Jerusalem. (*Where else to find a child who is born King, but in the King’s palace?*) Then, when they realize their error, the star reappears and leads them south to Bethlehem, where (according to the beloved hymn, *The First Noel*) “*And there it did both stop and stay, right over the place where Jesus lay.*”

The star rose... it moved to a destination, and Then. It. STOPPED. How do we explain that? Cosmic event? Intervention by God? So, what if the idea of Emmanuel, *God with us*, is being acted

out through the activity of God coming down among us at Christmas? Joseph hears God in dreams; Mary meets an archangel, Gabriel; Shepherds receive a birth announcement from heavenly hosts; Wise Ones get a star guide to their destination. Could God **be** more clear?!

**Then, my further wondering brings me to the Bible and us.** I mean, I've never seen a star rise, move across the sky slowly and then stop. I've never been on a hillside with angels filling up the skies singing Glory to the Lamb. I've never even ridden a donkey! How does this story say anything at all to me, or to you? Engaging Scripture means putting yourself into the story and developing a relationship with the characters to find a way to explore their human experience as if it were ours. *(Sort of like an actor inhabiting a role, which then becomes a part of their own persona, their own life.)*

Can we feel the embrace of a community the way they felt the support of their tribe? Do we make decisions the same way they so often did, based on power, and the security that princes of the world provide, or do we follow God's directions regardless of risk? What can we learn from these stories the same way we learn from our own lives?

**I mean, think about your situation 2 years ago, January 2017.** Where were you? Did you even live here then? Was your family bigger or smaller? What was going on with your life two years ago? Would you have followed a star God set before you without knowing where it would lead? Would you have stayed faithful to that journey even through unexpected turns that you have lived through since then? What if you ended up in Jerusalem, *which seemed the most likely place to find what you were looking for*, when you should have kept your eyes on Bethlehem? What was God doing that you could not know, and had you already put Jesus back in the box, just as the Wise Ones arrived?

And why **did** those Wise Ones follow? Well, why would you? *(Ponder that for the next few days.)* In the meantime, perhaps the great Christian author C.S. Lewis can give us the best advice: **"Look for Christ and you will find him. And with him, everything else."** Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser  
Advent Lutheran Church  
Olathe, KS  
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**Resources:** David Keck, *Sunday's Coming/Christian Century*; Raymond Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*; Thomas Long, *Christian Century* for 1.4.14