

January 8, 2017

**“Led by the Star”
Matthew 2:1-12**

I hope you had a blessed Christmas and a good start of a new year. Today we are celebrating Epiphany. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ to the wider world, even acknowledged by the constellations in the sky and by the wise men from the East, who had a completely different belief system from that of the family of Jesus, or even the people of Herod’s empire.

Those Magi saw a star rising and they hit the road for Jerusalem, going west, bearing gifts, to pay homage to the newly-born king of the Jews. They first went to the palace of King Herod, a very proper place to find a new born king. King Herod, who was a Roman client king of Judea, immediately sensed something very threatening about this baby’s rule and position as the King of the Jews. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where **the Christ, the Messiah**, was to be born.

They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea,” citing a prophecy from the book of Micah.

Herod then told the wise men an outright lie. He sent them forth to visit the child with instructions to let him know exactly where the baby was located so that he too could pay homage to the newborn King.

And so the men continued on their way to Bethlehem, following the star. When they saw the star shining over the town of Bethlehem, they were overjoyed. According to the Gospel of Matthew, they found Jesus in a house. I am sure it was a humble house. The wise men entered the house, found the child and a young woman from a humble origin..., fell on their knees and honored him. Then they offered their gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Seeing Jesus for themselves not only confirmed that he is indeed the one of whom the prophets spoke, but that the sign they had read in the sky had led them to something very real and something very joyful. They experienced the divine presence and power personally. And they responded by kneeling down before him; that is, essentially worshipping him.

Even though the wise men were not Jews, who had waited for the arrival of their Messiah, and their belief system and religious world view were totally different from those of the Jews, they saw something extraordinary and sacred about this child and worshipped Him.

Something about the Child was revealed to them, which led them to kneel and worship Him.

That leads us to raise the following questions as the church of Jesus Christ:

How can we help people from other belief systems, especially those who have rejected organized religion in general or the Christian faith in particular, experience a revelation that confirms for them that there is God whose heart for humanity humbled himself to be born in Bethlehem?

How can we reveal the gift of Jesus to those seekers in the style they prefer and in the language they use?

What signs from the world around us can we point to that reveal the presence and power of Christ at work, and the love of God at work?

How can we be and share the love of God to those who have lost faith in God?

Adam Hamilton, in the book, *The Journey*, shares a story about how God's presence was revealed to a woman.

Years ago, while I was serving as the youth director of a church in Texas, I took the youth to do repairs at the homes of two elderly women living in a blighted south Dallas neighborhood. Some of the other homes in their neighborhood were boarded up. Some had been torn down. Some were drug houses. These women had lived in this neighborhood for decades, but the world seemed to have forgotten them.

The women were excited when we arrived. As we scraped and caulked and painted their homes, they prepared cookies and lemonade and told us stories of their lives. These women knew they were teaching the youth that day. When we left their homes, they were so grateful and our youth were filled with joy.

The following Christmas, we decided to take the kids back one night to carol for these two women. Our youth took up an offering among themselves to give the women, and from their own money they collected two hundred dollars for each woman. They all signed Christmas cards for the women and tucked the money inside.

I'll never forget what happened at one of these homes. We emptied the bus, and forty-five youth stood around the doorstep of Miss Violet's home. We began to sing, and as we did, it seemed the whole neighborhood came outside to see what was happening. It had been a long time since any of them had seen a caroler on that street. Miss Violet turned on the front light and slowly opened the door as we sang. Then one of the youth stepped forward and presented her with gifts and the card. The young woman said, "Miss Violet, we came to remind you that God loves you. These gifts are a sign of his love and ours, too. Merry Christmas!"

Miss Violet stood there, dumbfounded. Her hands shaking, she opened the card and read it, then looked at the money that fell into her hands. Tears began to roll down her cheeks, and she said in almost a whisper, "Ever since my husband died, I thought God had forgotten me. Tonight, you reminded me that he still remembers I'm here."

Those youth revealed the presence of God to a woman, who had lost faith in God. The young woman's words echo in us. "We came to remind you that God loves you. These gifts are a sign of **his** love and ours too."

God sends us out as God's stars to lead those who are lost to Christ Jesus. This year, especially in this Epiphany season, may we be reminded that we are sent to be God's stars to the seekers and to the lost **as we are led** by the Star. Amen.