

**The Reverend Marjo Anderson**

**Epiphany  
Matthew 2.1-12**

**10 January 2021  
Salem, Bridgeport**

**“The Most Exciting Journey EVER!”**

It used to be that churches gathered for worship on Epiphany of Our Lord –  
the celebration of how Jesus’ true identity was revealed to the magi who followed a star.

Then the Sunday afterwards the story would move on to the Baptism of Our Lord –  
at which there was a second great epiphany as Jesus’ identity is confirmed at his baptism.

But now congregations don’t gather for worship on epiphany anymore, so the whole story gets skipped,  
and to me that seems a tremendous loss.

There’s something about this story that captivates my imagination, something that resonates deep within me,  
something that won’t let me skip this story.

We can celebrate Jesus’ baptism next week,  
but today I want to focus on this story of the wealthy educated astronomers  
that complements the story of the poor lowly shepherds.

There is something about this story of a star in the sky that excites me.

Perhaps it’s because there was a similar Christmas star in the heavens this year.

Perhaps it’s because in this past year of such darkness I crave the light of the star.

Perhaps it’s because I know what it is like to see a metaphorical star  
that is so beautiful and amazing and captivating that you simply have to follow it.

Now I think it’s obvious that a star in the heaven can’t exactly lead you to a particular place on earth.

It’s highly unlikely that you can tell over which building a star has stopped.

It’s extremely improbable that the star would act as a spotlight on a single specific dwelling.

And so while the star may certainly have given these astronomers a direction – west –  
that’s about the only geographical help it could have supplied.

And yet I believe it supplied something much more important than GPS instructions:

I believe that just as the Christmas star of 2020 was a combination of 2 planets,  
the star that excited the hearts and minds of the magi was the combining of 2 burning passions –  
the passion of these individuals to find their heart’s desire  
and the passion of God to fulfill the desires of their hearts which were planted there by God!

Why has God has placed you on this earth?

What is it that you were meant to accomplish?

What is the dream that excites your mind and fills your heart and burns in your soul?

What is it that you want to accomplish before your life’s end?

What is it that will bring you the greatest joy you can imagine?

To me that’s what the star symbolizes.

It’s that vision of the promise and presence of God  
that calls us to move from where we are to where God wants us to be,  
that shows us that we can be more than we are,  
and invites us to live into our fullest potential.

And that means that we can’t spend our time longing to return to another time or place,  
we can’t just stay where we are and keep doing things the way we’ve always done them,  
we can’t stop growing and learning and changing.

The magi likely led an incredible life.

They were living in the most advanced country in the world,  
and as top scientists in their field of astronomy they had power and prestige and fame and wealth.

And yet despite all they had,

there was something they lacked, something they desired, something that made them long for more –  
for something deeper, something more meaningful,  
something that would fill their hearts & souls & minds & bodies with peace & love & never-ending joy.

No matter what we have or don't have in this life, God desires to give us more –  
more of God's very self, more of Christ's love in our hearts, more of the Spirit's power in our lives.  
But God doesn't just give us our desires immediately –  
God gives them to us  
when we are ready to appreciate them and understand them and use them for God's glory.

It's like wanting to win a marathon.

The judges don't come out and give the trophies before the race starts;  
they wait until we have finished and won the race because only then will the trophy have any meaning.  
Whatever the passion, the desire, the dream that calls to you, you will have to journey to it.  
And that means that you will have to leave some things behind.  
You can't be somewhere else if you stay where you are.  
You can't have something different in your life if everything stays the same.  
You can't open your hands to receive a new gift, if your hands are full of old things.

So what can we expect from this journey?

First, we can expect a star to guide us.

That doesn't mean will always be able to see the star.  
We won't be able to see it in the daytime or when it's covered by clouds.  
We can't expect it to show us whether to take the path in front of us or the road a block over.  
We won't be able to tell how long we will have to follow it.  
But we can expect that the star will be there whether we can always see it or not,  
that we'll see it as frequently as we need to,  
and by following we can be assured we are going in the right direction,  
no matter how many dead ends or closed roads or obstructed paths we encounter.

Second, we can expect God to accompany us.

Just as the star, the dream, the goal, the passion is always there even when you lose sight of it,  
God is also always there.  
God is our traveling companion, who wants nothing more than to journey with us.

Third, the journey will not be instantaneous or fast, it will likely not be direct, nor will it be easy or smooth.

When God led the magi, it wasn't an overnight trip – it took months, maybe even years.  
When God led the people out of Egypt, they didn't step right in to the promised land.  
The promised land wasn't ready for them, and they certainly weren't ready for it.  
In the same way, God needs time to work on us, to mold us and shape us and form us  
into the people that we need to be so we will succeed in the promised land.

We can't expect God to conform to our timetable and schedule, because we don't see the big picture;  
instead we need to trust God's impeccable timing  
as we realize that our individual lives are part of a much bigger picture,  
and even if WE are ready for our future,  
there may be others who are to be a part of it who are not ready.

The journey will require that we hold onto hope,  
that we move forward in faith,  
and that we persist in patience,  
trusting in the promise and presence of God.

If we follow our star, if we trust that God is accompanying us, and if we journey with hope, faith & persistence,  
we can trust that the God who has brought us to this point will take us the rest of the way.

If we hold onto hope, if we move forward in faith, if we persist with patience,  
we will find what we seek, and be totally and completely awed by what God has done for us.

As we move into this new year,

I hope that you will see your star, that you will embark on your journey, and that you will find joy,  
not only at the end of your journey, but all along the way.

Thanks be to the God of abundant life, dazzling light and shining joy! **Amen**