

Feast of Epiphany C 2016
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
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“...,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 observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

I grew up in a small town, which, as you might imagine, had some pros and some cons. Among the pros were bright, clear skies all winter long. If there was something particularly fantastic in the heavens, our neighbor across the street, Mrs. White, would call us, and my parents and siblings and I would walk down our long snowy driveway, in the cold and the dark, to see whatever had caught her attention. Sometimes it was a comet, or the Northern Lights, or just a particularly fine night to look at the constellations or the planets.

Fast forward about twenty years, to our apartment in Chicago last winter. Our balcony overlooked a street in the heart of the bustling Gold Coast. When I stood out there at nighttime, to my right, I could see all the skyscrapers—the Sears Tower, the Hancock Tower, the Trump Tower. I could see planes coming in over the dark lake Michigan on their way to O'Hare airport. Sometimes, in the right light, and if I squinted, I could see a star.

I don't know what it is that compels us to look up at the sky. Maybe the vastness of the thing captures our attention. Or maybe it has something to do with awe or reverence. Or maybe we're looking for answers that seem elusive here on the mundane earth.

Whatever it might be, the urge to look up has been with us for ages. It is the same urge that drew the eyes the wise men up to the star in the East. I wonder what it was they were seeking? And I wonder if they were surprised when it turned out to be a baby who was God.

I see hope for all of us in this story. We are disciples of a God who wants us to find God—by any means necessary. For those men from the East with their gifts and their prophecies, God led them to a star which lit the way to Mary and the Christ-child—a humble and unexpected revelation of Godself. These men—not Jewish and certainly not Christian—called by God. The star didn't lead them to a palace or a skyscraper; the star led them to a barn.

I'll grant you that we're not wise kings from ancient times, but are we any less important to God? Of course not. How are we being led right now? What stars are urging us to follow? Last week, we were all Joseph, having dreams of warning and wisdom from God. This week we are all wise kings, arm in arm, with our gifts in our hands, trying to find the best path to God by the light of a star. I'll grant you that it can be hard to see heaven sometimes. Our skyscrapers—temples to ourselves—shine so bright. The busy neon nature of our frantic lives threatens to drown out the sky.

But we are undeterred, because God wants us to find God. And God is in the humble places, the unexpected places. There are families all across this city who are beaten down daily by the realities of poverty and violence. At the margins, we will find God. There are people in this city who have experienced the loss of a spouse, of a friend, of a child. In the grief, we will find God. There are people in this city who live lives of estrangement, of loneliness. In their isolation, we will find God.

We are being led, my friends, we are being led just like the wise kings were led. To the places where God dwells so that we might bring our gifts as well. We don't come with gold and myrrh, but we do come with ears ready to listen and hands ready to work.

I'll be the first to admit that it's not always easy to see where we should be going. It's not always like those clear winter nights in my home town, where I felt like I could see every star in heaven. More often, it feels more like those nights in Chicago, where I couldn't see a star to save my life. And it is scary to be lost. It's scary not knowing where we should go.

But I have a theory about this. I suspect that the success of the wise men had to do with their numbers. God didn't just call one. There was a group. Travelling together; finding the star together. Finding God together.

And that is us, my friends. This morning. We are travelling together, trying to figure out where God is calling St. Mark's Episcopal Church. We know it will be some kind of adventure, but we just don't know where it'll end up. But with the sure guidance of God—our true East, our North Star—there is no possible way we could become lost.

I'm grateful that, on this Feast of Epiphany—epiphany, a fancy word that simply means “reveal”—God is showing Godself to us. God reveals Godself to us in the midst of our imperfections, in the midst of our questions, in the midst of our uncertainty. God wants us to find God.

I know that we are called by God. And I know that we are called in a communal sense--in a corporate sense. We are called together to seek God in this city, to find the humble and unexpected places where God is revealed.

This is our call in these next months, as I get to know you and you get to know me--to find out where we are being led by God. To find out which of these stars we ought to follow and what gifts we have to bring.

So, let us go together. Let us look into the sky for the star—even when it is hard to see. Let us gather together those gifts we have for the care and consolation of the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the lonely. Let us walk arm in arm and answer the call of God in our lives. I'm not certain what it might look like when we arrive, but I know that we will, always, be led to God. Amen.