

Natalie W. Bell  
 January 9, 2022  
 Epiphany Sunday

***Follow the Star***  
***Matthew 2:1-12***

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men<sup>[a]</sup> from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,<sup>[b]</sup> and have come to pay him homage.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah<sup>[c]</sup> was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:*

*<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
 are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
 for from you shall come a ruler  
 who is to shepherd<sup>[d]</sup> my people Israel.’”*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men<sup>[e]</sup> and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” <sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,<sup>[f]</sup> until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped,<sup>[g]</sup> they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

Has anything ***grabbed your attention in a GOOD way*** lately?

Have you had any epiphanies? Or ‘a-ha’ moments?

Have you thought about how it might be ***God***—trying to draw you closer?

Or taking you down a new path?

In the midst of this ***crazy pandemic***—where have you seen signs of ***life and light***?

Where have you seen ***hope***?

Some people call these ‘***God-sightings***’, ***God-winks***, or ***God-nudges***.

Some call these things ‘coincidences’

But as people of faith, we don't really believe in those,

Because **God** is at work in our lives, *not fate* . . .  
the question is, *do we see God?*

Today is a reminder to really *stop and look for God*.  
To *think* about how God is breaking into our lives,  
And grabbing our attention.  
It's the day to think about our *God-sightings!*

We are doing this because today we celebrate *Epiphany*.  
Epiphany is January 6<sup>th</sup>, the 12<sup>th</sup> and final day, of Christmas.  
The day when we celebrate the wise men from the East  
who went out of their way to find the baby Jesus.  
The word **Epiphany** means a *sudden appearance,*  
*experience or revelation* from God—

The epiphany of the wise men was about a brightest star,  
a *sign from God*, that someone had been born, a Savior for the world,  
a new King of the Jews.  
It was a star that led these wise men on a journey  
that would change their lives forever.

These men, who paid attention to the skies, these astronomers  
who had studied, and watched, and waited,  
one night saw an *awesome, brilliant star*—and they knew *it was from God*.  
These men were not even Jews, they were men of science,  
but they knew this was something spiritual, so they left everything to follow it.

They saw the star, and didn't label it as *coincidence*, or dumb luck,  
They knew it was an *epiphany*.  
So they left everything, and traveled a great distance,  
bringing their finest gifts to this newborn Savior.

I can only imagine the shock of their *families as they left*.  
*You are going where? To do what?*

And the shock of **Herod** and the chief priests when they saw these exotic men from  
the East come riding into town looking  
for a NEW King of the Jews! *You are here for whom?*

When you think about it,  
What they did took incredible *courage*.

They took a leap of faith that this great star would lead them to *something*,  
And *someone amazing*, and indeed it did.

The Bible says that the star stopped over the home of Jesus,  
and when they arrived, they were overwhelmed *with JOY*.

The brilliant star led them right to a tiny newborn Savior,  
so they opened their treasure chests and gave Jesus *their finest gifts*—  
gifts fit for a King--gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These wise men were able to find Jesus because they were *paying attention*.  
They were looking for *signs*.  
They studied the skies,  
and they knew when to *stop and follow* a special star.

I wonder, are *we paying attention* to our lives?

When we are looking for stars at night,  
we can only see them when the *sky is dark*.

So, we need to pay *attention*, when *our lives are dark*.  
Like right now, in this pandemic.  
When you think about it, it makes sense, right?  
When things are *hard*, and seem dark all around us,  
that's when we *really NEED a sign* from God, isn't it?  
That's when we usually ask God for help, right?

We need a little *ray of hope, a tiny sliver of light*---  
When things are dark around us.

*I asked Ed* one time, what epiphanies he's had in his life,  
and one of the biggest was when his Dad told him,  
"Son, I think you need to go back to church".  
But you know WHEN his Dad said this to him?  
During his divorce.  
When things were hard, and life was dark.

Things are pretty dark right now in this *pandemic*,  
and with all the *hostility and division* in our nation.  
Unfortunately, what should be a *health crisis* is now a political one.

What if we could find epiphanies of hope and light by getting *back to basics as Christians*—together?

We are called to care for the most *vulnerable* in our midst. Those who are struggling, those who are sick, those who can't afford to get sick. We are called to love our neighbors, doing everything in our power to do so, which means we are taking our precautions here, out of love. We believe, in this time that we're in, *there is light and life*—and we can find it, as we care for one another, as we reach out in love.

It is a dark time.  
But there's something *about the dark times that can really lead us to God. Especially when we are in the dark—together.*

Sometimes *we don't even know how much we need God* until life is dark!

I was thinking this week about incredible generosity that has blessed me over the years, and how I would have never experienced it without the circumstance of being *in need*.  
It was when I didn't have enough to pay bills that someone's *unexpected gift in the mail* was such a miraculous blessing.  
It was when my husband left and I had to comfort two little ones that *generous gifts of love* were transformative to myself, and my kids.  
It was when I walked through illness that the *gentleness and compassion* of others meant the world to me.

It is *in the dark, that light takes on new meaning*—  
and can really bring us *hope*.  
It CAN really bring us *together*.

So in this dark time, how are we looking for *epiphanies*? For *God-sightings*?  
Don't those little rays of light take on new meaning now?

I find that God can *use just about ANYTHING* to bring light,  
God can use a star,  
Or a song, a book, or a conversation, or the outdoors.  
Even an illness, a tragedy, or an unexpected opportunity.  
In my life, I have found that God uses *all kinds of things to speak to me*.

Once God used a *dream, to show me the end of a trial was near.*  
 When I woke up I knew that God was telling me to *hold on,*  
 And *keep walking towards the light,* no matter how far away it might seem.

So, how is God trying to get your *attention?*  
 How is God *shining a light* in your situation?

You never know what God might use  
 to move us in a *new direction,*  
 and bring us closer to *joy!*

When we follow the light, or the ‘stars’ that pop up in our lives,  
 Something *important* happens.  
 We are led closer to God, closer to Jesus,  
 And we start to experience *gratitude* to God!

That’s what the wise men did—they brought *gifts* of gratitude—  
 in the form of gold, frankincense and myrrh—  
 Very expensive treasures of their day.

What about us? What *time, talent, or resources* can we give to God?  
 We all have *something* we can bring.

When we *pay attention* to the God-sightings,  
 When we *follow the stars* that God sends our way,  
 the result is *Joy.*

The wise men were *overwhelmed with joy* –because the star led them to *Jesus.*  
 The *same thing can* happen to us, today.  
 We can follow the light God puts in our lives—and *find joy.*

That’s the *Good News of Epiphany.*  
 And today I want us to *take that Good News home* with us,  
 And think about it all year!

Today on this *Epiphany* celebration, I want to *give each of you here*  
 A *word*, written on a *star*, in honor of the *Star of Bethlehem.*  
 They are all faith-words, words of inspiration,  
 each one of them applicable to every one of us.

If you are not here in person, you can **still get a star, just contact me or stop by my office**—

**OR**, you can take a faith-word that comes to your mind right now, and use it. Write it down.

It could be any WORD that draws you to God—for instance--*faith, grace, prayer, hope, courage, trust*....*any word* that brings you closer to God.

Then I encourage you to *reflect* on this word, *all year long*.

Take it to heart,

*And believe this word is* for you in this new year.

Put it somewhere *prominent*, to see every day.

Take time to *think about* it.

Look it up in the *dictionary*.

Look up where it is found in the *Bible*.

Allow it to *speak* to you, even if at times you resist it.

Let it remind you of God's *presence in your life*.

Know that it is a *gift* from God, a gift that will *keep on giving to you*.

It's something you can *hold onto*, in times of trouble.

These words are like *epiphanies*,

a *light* shining in the darkness, a *star of hope*.

They inspire us keep going, and *to give* back, out of gratitude for God's gifts.

Now *let us stop and pray for God* to use these words in our lives:

*Loving God, we acknowledge that we are not always ready to receive your gifts. You have given us these words to bring us closer to you. Help us to be open to the gift that you offer us. We do not fully understand what this word might mean for our faith, but we receive it with gratitude and pray that your Spirit will enable us to live into our word with intention and faithfulness. May we look back on this day a year from now, having learned from this word and this gift. This we pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.*

Friends, Follow the Star, and receive the good news.

For this, all God's people can say together, Amen.