

Natalie W. Bell
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 Epiphany Sunday

Epiphany—Follow the Light
Matthew 2:1-12

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

⁶ ‘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^[d] my people Israel.’ ”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the magi^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

When I was thinking about this story,
 I started thinking about the **light**.
 About the star that they followed, all the way to little Jesus.
 The star that took them away from their friends and family and homeland,
 To find a Savior who would change their lives forever.

Made me think of a few years ago, when I lost my wedding ring,
 And used some light to try and find it.
 I set my **rings** down on a comforter so I could put lotion on my hands...
 and I forgot about them.

Well...you can just imagine the rest of that story!

When I realized later I couldn't find them, they were gone. **Gone**.
Nowhere to be found.

We **tore that room apart** from top to bottom.

We took out **flashlights** and started carefully looking everywhere,
moving furniture, vacuuming, cleaning.

We found lots and lots of dust bunnies, and a lot of long, lost objects.

Somehow, miraculously, **the rings flew** into the air when the comforter was fluffed
up—and landed in an open pocket of a bag hanging nearby.

We found them by chance (or by God I should say)
when I used that bag several days later.

The result? I found a special place to put my rings if I take them off,
And that room—was incredibly clean!

All that cleaning with lights shining into every corner, was amazing.

We **found** all kinds of things we didn't even know we'd lost!

A purse, a scarf, dog toys.....

Have you found yourself looking for something **you've lost**?
And did you ever find things you **forgot that you had lost**?

When have you used **a light to shine into** a corner of your life?

This story of the wise men has a lot of **light shining into different lives**.

The wise men have the light of the star guiding them,

But for Herod, the light is shining into a dark place,
and he is not happy about it, at all.

Light shining into our lives **is usually positive**,
but it can have a negative effect, right?

We **don't always want** a bright light shining into our lives, do we?

Aren't there things we'd rather leave in the dark?

I mean, when light comes into darkness, truth is revealed, habits are uncovered,
secrets are exposed.

When light shines into darkness, the results can be threatening and scary.

Not all light brings joy.

This was certainly **true of the light** shining into the darkness at Jesus' birth.

For some, this was a light of joy and life, and it was *good news*.
For others it was an omen, a threat, *bad news*.

For the *magi* who traveled from the East to find the newborn king,
it was a life-giving light.

Those astrologers looked to the night skies for signs,
And they knew this was a fantastic sign!

A true Epiphany—a guiding, life-changing star.

Some historians have *recorded astrologers*
traveling from the East to find other kings, like Nero in 66 AD.
So wise men could have been looking into the night sky for signs,
including one indicating that a new leader was born.

And it would not have been out of the question
to travel a great distance to see a new king.

Feasting on the Word, Year C , Vol. 1, pg. 215, (from Pliny, *Natural History* 30.1, 16; Dio Cassius 63:1-7, Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 13)

Some say this *Bethlehem star* was a convergence of Jupiter and Saturn in the sky,
while others believe it was simply a bright constellation.

Whatever it was—

it was bright enough and powerful enough for the wise men
to pick up and follow it, until it stopped over a house in Bethlehem.

And how *fitting* that a *bright light*, shining into darkness,
was what drew Gentiles from the East to the newborn King of the Jews.

Remember what the Gospel of *John says about Jesus in chapter 1:*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Jesus refers to himself as the *light of the world*,
and he also refers to his *followers* as light.

In Matthew 5:14 Jesus calls **US** the light of the world!

Jesus says: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

So, Jesus is our light.
And we can let His light *shine through* us.

But, how often do you think about Jesus as the *light of your life*?
We talk about his forgiveness, his love, his grace,
But what about his *light* shining into our lives?

How might Jesus be shining a light into the darkness of *your life*?
And do you allow His light *to shine* through you?

The light may *not always be welcome*.
Jesus' light was not always welcome.

Simeon told his parents this, when they brought the baby Jesus to the temple to be named. Simeon was an old and righteous man waiting to see the Messiah. When Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to be dedicated, Luke 2 says:.
2:27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,
28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,
29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."
33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Wow.
Simeon *knew* that the infant Jesus was coming into the darkness of our world, to bring light—a light that would *reveal the thoughts* of many.

So for some this would be *good news* of great joy, while for others it would be a *challenge*, a sign to be opposed, and even a *sword* piercing the soul of his mother Mary.

For Herod, the light of Christ was a sign to be opposed.
 The light of the Bethlehem star was an omen and a threat to him.
 So much so that he had all the baby boys two years old and younger put to death,
 just to be sure that no newborn king of the Jews would survive!

But to the **Magi**, the wise men from the East,
 it was just what we call this Sunday—an **Epiphany**—
 a revelation of **good news, and great joy**.
 So much joy and gratitude, that they brought their finest treasures of gold,
 frankincense and myrrh, and worshipped Jesus.

You know, every Sunday we celebrate Jesus as the light.
 Whenever we light candles in this sanctuary--
 It is the **light of Christ**, and a reminder that **we shine his light**.

So, where is the light of Christ in **your heart**?
 And how do you let that light shine **through your life**?

When I think about it, sometimes the light of Christ **reveals things**
 We didn't even know we were **missing**.
 I read a scripture, or a devotional, and it cuts deep into my soul,
 showing me strength and power I didn't even know I needed, or that I'd lost.

Other times the light of Christ **reveals a whole lot of dust**, dirt, clutter, and
 disorganization—
 and I realize just how much I need God's power to pull it all together,
 and clean it up.

What about **you**?
 What **happens** when you let God's light into your life?
 What happens to you—when you allow a **scripture or sermon to speak** to you?
 What about when you take the **advice** of a wise faithful believer?
 Or when you **read or hear** something and you know it is God nudging and guiding
 you—revealing things you didn't even know you'd lost,
 or dirt that you didn't realize was hiding in your soul?

We **don't always plan** to let Christ's light shine into our lives,
 Sometimes it's like losing my rings...
 But once we let His light shine,
 We find all kinds of treasures,

and dark corners get a complete makeover in that light!

Sometimes *we don't even realize how much we need* the light,
Until it is shining into the darkness around us.

Epiphany (Jan 6th) is the *12th and final day of Christmas*,
But it's also the beginning of a new season and a new year.
Howard Thurman says that the work of Christmas begins when Christmas ends,
In his poem, **The Work of Christmas**. He writes:
*When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock, The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry, To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations, To bring peace among others, To make music in the heart.*

Let's do the real work of Christmas, by *attending to the light of Christ*.
The light that led those wise men, the light that leads us still today.
In that spirit, I hope you'll take *an Epiphany star word from the basket in the
narthex*, to guide you through 2023.
Put it on your mirror, or your refrigerator, or in your Bible,
So you'll see it and think about what it means in your life this year.
Treat it as a light—shining into your heart and life.
An Epiphany—a sign of *what God is doing in you and around you*.

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*,
revealed to us through the Epiphany that guided the wise men.
Jesus is a light shining into the *darkness*,
And into the dark corners of our *hearts*.
He is a light shining into our *broken, fallen world*.
And His light will not be overcome.

His light brings *life* to us.
And it's the kind of light that *we can shine*,
And carry out into the world.

The *angels were right* when they announced his birth:
it IS good news of great joy, for us!
He is the *light of the world*.
The light of our lives!
And for that light, all God's people can say together, Amen.