



Following the Star
Rev Grace Behm
Year A, The Epiphany
Isaiah 60:1-6; Matt 2:1-12
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Every summer, many of us step outside after dark and look up. The air is warm, the days are long, and when the light finally fades, the sky opens wide. For some of us, it's the only time all year we notice the stars properly- standing barefoot on the grass, or pausing at the beach while the tide comes in. We might recognise the Southern Cross, maybe Te Ika-o-te-rangi, or maybe Orion's Belt and we remember that long before streetlights and screens, the night sky was not simply background scenery but a map, a story, a guide.

For centuries, sailors navigated by stars. Polynesian voyagers crossed vast oceans by reading the heavens, trusting that fixed lights could guide them across moving waters. To follow a star was not poetic; it was practical. It was a matter of life, direction, and survival. That matters when we come to the story of the Magi. Because in the Gospel reading, Matthew is not telling us a fairy tale. He is telling us about people who knew how to read the sky, who trusted that light could lead somewhere real.

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,” Matthew writes, “Magi 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’”

The first thing to notice is that the Magi were not insiders. They were not part of the covenant people. They did not know the Scriptures by heart, nor did they grow up hearing the promises read aloud in a synagogue. Instead, they were astrologers, scholars of the heavens,

foreigners with accents and assumptions shaped far from Jerusalem. They read the sky rather than the sacred texts. And yet, they were the ones who noticed the star.

In his Homily at Epiphany last year, Pope Francis reminded us that this is no accident. “The star”, he says, “shines in the sky and offers its light to all. It does not belong to one people, one language, or one tradition. It rises over borders and boundaries. It appears not to reward the worthy, but to invite the attentive. In that light, the Magi stand as a sign that the Son of God comes into the world to encounter every person- whatever their ethnicity, their culture, or the road that brought them here.”

The star does not ask the Magi to become someone else before they follow it. It meets them where they are, using the language they already know. God speaks to them through the heavens they study, just as God speaks to shepherds through angels and to prophets through dreams. The revelation is universal, but it is never generic. It is both personal and contextual.

That universality carries a challenge. Pope Francis insists that the star’s light calls us to reject anything that discriminates, excludes, or discards people. The God revealed in Epiphany does not guard holiness behind gates or credentials. Instead, God opens spaces- wide, generous spaces- where fear gives way to encounter, and suspicion gives way to shared life.

The star is placed in the sky, not so that it remains distant and inaccessible, but so that its light can be seen by everyone. So that it can reach every home. So that it can cross every barrier. Even the ones we have learned to accept as normal. Especially the ones we have learned not to question.

The Magi are living proof of this. They come from far away, carrying wisdom that did not originate in Jerusalem, and they are not turned away. Their difference is not a problem to be managed. It is part of the story God is telling. They remind us that God's light reaches the most remote and forgotten corners of the world, and that sometimes it is those furthest from the centre who recognise it first.

Here in this season of summer light, when the nights are warm and the stars are visible again, Epiphany invites us to lift our eyes once more, to ask what we are orienting our lives toward, to notice which lights we are following, and where they are leading us. Because the star of Epiphany is not hidden or selective. It shines for all. It rises over every boundary and reaches into every home.

In our tradition, we mark that home with chalk, inscribing the doorway with the year and the initials of the Magi, C+M+B. Today, as part of our service, we will do this together here, blessing the doors of this sacred space as a sign that God's light shines in and among us. It is a simple gesture, but one full of meaning: it reminds us that God's light is never distant or inaccessible. It enters our houses, our lives, our daily routines.

And this is not only for the church building. You are invited to take this tradition home with you, to inscribe your own doorways as a way of marking your household with God's presence for the year ahead. Each time you pass that doorway, you can remember that the light of Christ reaches in, calling us to welcome the stranger, to open space where fear or suspicion might otherwise close us off, and to live generously in the ordinary places where love is born.

By doing this, the invisible becomes visible. The faith we follow is not only in words or rituals, but in acts that touch our daily lives, shaping the way we encounter one another and the world. And so, like the Magi, we are invited to move. To let ourselves be drawn beyond what

is familiar or comfortable, to follow a light that leads us not toward power or certainty, but toward encounter, toward welcome, toward love made flesh. For the star that rose over Bethlehem still shines. Not as a distant relic of the past, but as a living sign of God's love - visible, generous, and near- calling us onward, calling us outward, calling each of us, gently and persistently, toward the incarnate Christ who waits not on a throne, but in the ordinary places where love is born.

Amen.