

Matthew 2: 1-12  
Epiphany  
January 8, 2017  
Lincoln Street UMC

Having driven out past the last light of town, their headlights bore a way through the darkness as they continue down the deserted road. There's not a soul in sight, not a light in the distance. No homes with the kitchen windows ablaze, no other travelers, no billboards lit up with advertising. It is just the two halogen bulbs of the car, blazing the way forward along the painfully straight prairie highway.

Eventually they pull to the side of the road, and turn off the headlights, the last forms of human made light.

The clear night sky suddenly comes alive before them. They lay a blanket out on the frozen ground, lie back and sky fills their vision. Starlight all the way to the edge of the horizon. The Milky Way marking a blurry ribbon. Constellations weaving and crossing. Heavenly light. Something very other-worldly.

The light of the stars pulls one into regarding one's place in the story of the cosmos. Starlight begs one consider the wide arc of story in which we are but small players. And it beckons us to enter, calls us into wonder, and a wider understanding of the mystery at the center of life. The stars point to a different way to know and follow Love at the heart of the universe.

All this from gazing up and entering in - to dream, reverie, hope, vision.

What might it mean for us as a people, to own our heritage? To truly be people of the stars - or rather, a star? In this year that promises continued political strife, racial bigotry, tribal wars, and growing economic disparity, in a year that promises such stress and hardship, what would it mean to turn our gaze in another direction? Spread our blankets before the wonder of our Creator and let the story of the stars be written upon us?

“The shadow of this world will say, there’s no hope why try anyway?”<sup>1</sup> But what if we did? What if we became magi - wise ones - this year and asked a star to guide us?

The story of the magi is not an easy one. We don’t even have to listen that closely to hear the undercurrents of political positioning. Herod’s diligent examination of the magi - just exactly *when* did you see the rising of the star? he wants to know of them. And the trouble their news creates, the rumbles of worry - *all throughout* Jerusalem the waves of this information are felt.

The story of the magi is not an easy one. These wise travelers from afar have taken on a great risk in seeking the vision of the child born. They endured hardships of desert travel, presenting themselves before a ruler who was erratic and unreliable in his response to visitors and unwelcome news.

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<sup>1</sup> Carrie Newcomer, “Lean in Toward the Light” lyrics.

And as it turns out, their premonitions about this Herod proved right. For even though they went home a different way, so as not to see Herod again, the end result was the same. Children dead in the streets because a despotic ruler worried over his position and power.

The story of the magi is not an easy one. And perhaps that's where its power lies.

This is not a story of starlight in a child's verse, where we can wish with all of our might to make it come true.

This is starlight that asks us to lean in toward risk and uncertainty. Guided by the truth that Love, the powerful source at the center of all that is, that Love beckons us.

Love beckons us in all sorts of ways, with all kinds of meanings. Some of us will be asked to embark on the new, others of us to shore up the frail. Some of us to speak in poetry others of us in action.

The light of the star beckons, calls into a wider understanding of the Divine - that mystery at the center of life, Love at the heart of the universe.

Love is asking us to be kind even when it is not rewarded. Love is asking us to fight for justice even when the way seems barred. Love is asking us to practice forgiveness even when the monsters don't deserve it. Love is asking us to let the light of a star show us down a path that might be hard to travel. For the story of the magi is not an easy one.

But like those wise travelers from long ago, we too have been gifted a light shining before us, in the story of the Christ child and his eventual ministry. This light takes the dark and turns it to dusk. And sometimes when we all are working together the whole sky lights up before us. Blanketing us in the reassurance that there is a story at work greater than despots killing children for their own gain.

In fact, there are magi everywhere. So let us be a people who aren't afraid to speak a word of hope and be guided by a point of light. Let us be a people who are energized to travel new roads and hear new callings.

The story of the magi is not an easy one. But we know that death does not have the final say. And so we can fling our eyes to the heavens and enter in - to dream, reverie, hope, vision. We can practice resurrection.

We are wise and wonderful. And the world is counting on us. To take the risk to hope. So let us lean in toward the light and be lit from within with the Love at the heart of the universe.

Amen.

This week in his farewell address, President Obama encouraged us in a different way, but with the same interest of the star at heart. As we pass around the basket of stars, let us hear this 21st century magi encourage and cajole us into greater and deeper expressions of love and justice.

He said, "If you're tired of arguing with strangers on the internet, try to talk with one in real life. If something needs fixing, lace up your shoes and do some organizing.

If you're disappointed by your elected officials, grab a clipboard, get some signatures, and run for office yourself. Show up. Dive in. Persevere."

Friends, let us find creative and many ways to lean in toward the light - taking the risk to stand for what we believe and carrying the hope that Love's light will lead us through even the darkest moments.

"Yes we can. Yes we did." Yes we *do*.