

## **2025 01 05 – A Light is Gleaming**

**Scripture:** **Matthew 2:1-12** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Today we are exploring the story of Jesus' birth as it is told in the Gospel of Matthew. In this version of the story, Joseph and Mary are engaged and living in Bethlehem, not in Nazareth. When Joseph finds out that his fiancé is pregnant, he decides to end their engagement quietly. But then an angel comes to Joseph in a dream and convinces him that he should go ahead with the marriage. So they do, and when their son is born, Mary and Joseph call him Jesus.

It is sometime after Jesus' birth that astrologers from the East arrive in Jerusalem looking for the "newborn ruler of the Jews." These astrologers tell the folks in King Herod's court that they "observed [this child's] star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." It's not clear why these astrologers felt that this particular star was connected to a new Jewish ruler. We can only guess that in their yearning to understand the stars they also studied the religious texts of their neighbours in the Middle East, and that they were aware of passages like Numbers 24:17 that says, "a star arises from Leah and Rachel and Jacob; a sceptre arises from the nation of Israel."

What the story does tell us, is that this new star in the sky is enough to send these astrologers, these wise men, on a very long journey. If we assume that they lived in Parthia, in an area now known as Iraq, then they probably travelled over 900 miles to meet this newborn ruler. It is believed, by the time they got there, Jesus was probably already a toddler.

It's fascinating to think that these astrologers, these Magi would travel so far on what seems like a whim. It was just a star, a light gleaming in the night sky. There's a good chance that it wasn't even all that bright. I wonder, "What made them take that dangerous journey?" And then I wonder about all the journeys that I have made in my life. What took me to Nunavut, why did I travel to Ireland, what brought me here to Saskatchewan and eventually to Swift Current? And I realize that so many of the journeys that we take in our lives happen because of glimmers of light, because of short moments of knowing, because of epiphanies.

When I think of my own discernment process, I realize that there were multiple epiphanies that added up to my final decision to enter seminary. There was the time I sat listening to the minister preaching a sermon at Bellefair United Church and the thought came into my head just out of the blue, that this was something that I could do. It was one of those "lightbulb moments" in my life. It was both terrifying and exciting. During those years of discernment I also got to the point where I couldn't sing "Here I Am Lord" without tears flowing down my face.

Epiphanies happen in lots of different ways. They touch us in our hearts and in our minds.

The astrologers have an epiphany when they notice a new star in the sky. It reminds them of an ancient Hebrew prophecy and they act on this realization. When they arrive in Jerusalem, their news greatly disturbs King Herod. The last thing he wants to hear about is the possibility of someone who will threaten his throne. He calls together all his wise men, his religious scholars to find out where this baby is supposed to be born. They search the ancient scriptures and

suggest that the city of Bethlehem is to have that honour. Herod sends the Magi to Bethlehem asking them to report back to him before returning home.

As I was reading the scripture this week I have to admit that I had my own epiphany. I have always pictured the astrologers following this new star throughout their journey. But what this particular translation actually says is that “the star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child lay. They were overjoyed at seeing the star and, upon entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother.” The star went ahead of them. It’s like when I moved to Saskatchewan and I came ahead of the truck that was carrying all my belongings. That truck didn’t follow me all the way to Saskatchewan, but eventually we ended up at the same place.

The astrologers were overjoyed at seeing the star. To me that sounds like they hadn’t seen this star in a long time. That throughout their journey the star had not been with them. That’s how epiphanies work. They appear, sometimes when we are least expecting them, but we can go through long periods of time when those glimmers of light just don’t appear, when we are travelling on faith, hoping that we are still on the correct path. The astrologers were overjoyed at seeing the star because it was confirmation that they were in the right place, that they had found “the newborn ruler of the Jews.”

Epiphanies happen throughout our lives. They happen in many different ways. But they happen most frequently when we allow ourselves to be open to new possibilities. At the end of my reflection, we will be listening as Linnea Good

sings her hymn, "Living in the Light" also known by its first line, "A Light is Gleaming." This week I found on her website, a description of how she came to write this particular song. I want to share it with you now. Linnea wrote

I had just come back from 3 years away at school, and had found my eyes opened in more ways than I had expected in that time. School is a time when you choose to allow your eyes to be opened - or you don't. If you say yes to allowing new ideas into your life, you are taking a risk of greater openness to the world. In a way, you don't get to choose which insights come to you, which truths confront you, when you do this. You have said "Yes" to Spirit, and life begins to open up around you.

Some of my friends began to remember hard and forgotten events of their own past as they studied scripture. It was like the stories that we had known so well became mirrors for them. I remember one such class in which we took apart parables, acting them out, re-telling them. One of us retold the biblical story of a man in authority whom we all would have described as unjust and cruel. She told us he was kind. She began to describe how he was fair. As she spoke, we began to see the lights go out in her eyes; she was realizing she had told herself her whole life that unfair was fair, that cruel was kind, that one who had betrayed her trust was somehow trustworthy...

It was a tumultuous year for my friend. It was quite a year for me, learning how to support and understand. What seemed really true to me then, as now, is:

"When light comes pouring into the darkest place,  
it hurts our eyes to see the glow.  
Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,  
our memories and tears."

<https://www.linneagood.com/stories-behind-songs>

What Linnea recognized during her time of study, and what she wrote about in her song, was that epiphanies are not always easy. Sometimes the new understanding or realization is one that is painful and challenging. It may even change the course of our lives. But Linnea, in her explanation goes on to say:

I believe that Jesus is a way into the healing energy of God. I can see now that I described him in verse 3 as one who "showed us a brighter path to walk" - a guide and mentor or role model. Now I would describe him as a pathway through which God is drawing me toward God's Self. That Jesus creates an illumination of the Holy. Opening our eyes to that illumination is a brave act, but I believe that when we are invited by Spirit to see more of the truth, we will be given the support we need to deal with it.

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Like Linnea I also believe that the Essence of Love, the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being is with us to support and guide us no matter what path we take. So may we, like the astrologers from the East, be open to the epiphanies that will come our way. May we, like Linnea and the others in her class, be willing to follow where those epiphanies will lead us. May we all travel on our journey of life knowing that we are not alone, that a light is gleaming, that the love of the Holy Mystery is with us, wherever we may be.

May it be so. Amen.