

Will You Follow The Star?

Matthew 2:1-12

Like many learned people in their day, the Gospel of Matthew's Wise Men or Magi looked at the stars to tell them what the future might hold. They were among many of that time who advised kings and queens and armies based on the signs in the sky. In similar fashion, many in the Hebrew tradition also believed that the words of the Prophets, like the words of the Prophet Micah quoted in the Gospel, were not just relevant to the Prophets time, but also revealed mysteries about the Coming Messiah.

Ironically though, the Hebrew Prophets were not soothsayers - people who specifically predict far future events (which was forbidden in the Hebrew religion). The Prophets always God's promises and God's judgement to the people about what they were doing today. In good times and bad, the prophets told the people that they would reap what they sowed if they were unfaithful, and also that God would forgive them and restore them afterwards. Oh, sometimes the words of the prophets echo in history, like the words that also describe Jesus' life that we hear at Christmas and Holy Week. But still today, many people of faith (like the author of the Left Behind Series) try to read the signs, try to discern when and what the final day of judgement will look like as if the Bible is a great mystery that they only can solve. It is quite funny that they would even try because Jesus himself says "No one knows the hour of the coming of the Son of Man." Apparently the contemporary soothsayers think that Jesus was talking about everyone but them.

Today instead of wrestling with how the Magi fit into a complicated map of prophecies and obscure Biblical references, let us instead ask this question: what do the Magi, the wise ones, teach us about faithfulness? How can we incorporate their willingness to follow that star into our lives?

First, a word about stars. who can tell us what the brightest star in Ursa Minor; the one at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper; commonly known as

the North Star because the northern axis of the earth points toward it. It is also called Polaris, or the guiding star. The dictionary says it is "used as a reference point in navigation." In other words, the North star tells us where we are and helps us know if we are heading in the right direction. Of course, there are many stars in the sky. As Jude implied in our prayer, some are dark stars, stars that shed no light, and yet they can lure us in with their gravity. Stars that are so powerful that sometimes we don't know that they can totally consume us until it is too late. Dark stars of addiction, or greed, or apathy. There are other dim stars, not quite as strong, but still powerful enough to trap us in their orbit, stars of poverty, or oppression; white privilege, or sexism that try to keep hidden, illness, both physical and mental. These stars call to us, battle with the bright and shining stars inside our souls for our allegiance. What dim stars are seeking to hold us in the status quo? And also, what dark stars seek to lure us closer and closer until we are trapped or maybe even destroyed? We don't have to do much to fall completely into the orbits of dim or dark stars,

In contrast, the Star of Bethlehem, much like the North Star, requires a decision and a commitment. A commitment to follow the way, the path of faith and hope, love and peace... the way of illumination. The Star of Bethlehem offers those values as signposts to help us know we remain on the path of faithfulness. But unlike the dim and dark stars, the Star of Bethlehem offers no guarantee up front. Dim stars guarantee you no difficulty, no wrenching self-reflection, no worry, just the same old, same old, same old. The dark stars, they guarantee momentary pleasure or relief, but at the cost of your soul, one teaspoon at a time.

The Star of Bethlehem called the Magi, it appeared in their sight. They knew it meant something important, but they could have stayed home. They could have just waited for CNN to cover it. But instead they packed up with nothing but a vision, a possibility and headed West following the star. The star of

wonder called to them and said, "Come and see a miracle." The star with royal beauty bright, said "Come and see Emmanuel, God with Us." But they had to travel a long time, with no other signposts. Only the star. And when they arrived in the halls of power in Israel there was confusion, paranoid politicians and chaos when they told their story. They could have turned back then, giving up... but they kept following the star... until they saw the King of Kings. A child of humble peasant parents.

What are the stars that are rising on the horizon in your life? What are the possibilities, the hopes that dance in your head? What are the visions that seem to weave in and out of your dreams and day-dreams? What is God offering for you to do or be? Where is God calling you to explore? Whether you are 7 or 107 there is a star for you in 2019. Some of us know exactly what it is. Some of us have no idea. Some of us may receive a star word today that will make no sense, but will unfold and become clear. But the real question is, are we willing to follow the star of light, the North Star, the Star of Bethlehem? We are guaranteed this: if nothing changes in our life, nothing changes. The dim stars will hold us comfortably right where we are with inertia powered gravity. It is the easiest choice, but not the one that will bring us life. Will we dare to make a change? Even if it seems silly or absurd or we don't really understand it? Will we follow the star even if it means tilting at windmills with no guarantees?

We have a choice today. We can choose to follow a new star of illumination and transformation. Or we can let things quietly remain the same, allowing the gravity of dim and dark stars to hold us in place or even pull us down to destruction.

Jesus followed his star to an upper room where he gathered with his disciples. The son of peasants with no formal education, no wealth or power, who, along with his band of ragged and questionable disciples, was turning the

world up-side down. When gathered there at the feast of liberation he gave them himself as a guiding star. His life example as the path of light.

On that night he took the Bread, and after giving thanks he broke it saying, "this is my body broken to give you strength and courage." Then after supper he took the cup and after giving thanks said, "this cup is the promise signed with my blood that as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, I am with you to help and guide you until I come again.

Jesus himself is the host of this table and all who seek to follow him and his example are welcomed to partake.

Please come down the side aisles to the two stations, take bread and dip it in the cup and partake, you are then invited to receive a star word for the year ahead in the center and return to your seats via the center aisle.

Come for all is prepared.

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men 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." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'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 my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 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." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Mary Anne Radmacher, 21st century

"As we work to create light for others, we naturally light our own way."

V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*, 20th century

"Small things start us in new ways of thinking."

Constantine E. Scaros, 21st century

"Without the quest, there can be no epiphany."