

## ***STAR SUNDAY***

A Meditation for Epiphany Sunday  
United Congregational Church, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
Sunday, January 5, 2020  
Text: Matthew 2:1-12

The celebration of Epiphany in the Christian tradition may well be the oldest of all the celebrations connected to the birth of Jesus. References to it can be found in documents dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Originally it was connected to the celebration of the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist which is now celebrated on the second Sunday of January. Epiphany recalls and celebrates the visit of the three “Wise Men” also known as the “Three Kings” to the newly born Christ Child and his family. They bring gifts which the scriptures describe as gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gifts themselves are significant in that the gold acknowledges the Christ Child as a person of royal blood while the frankincense and myrrh foreshadow his death. No typical baby gifts these!!

Another noteworthy but often overlooked fact revealed in Matthew’s description of this event is that, by the time the three Wise Men arrive on the scene, they are not visiting the family in the stable where the shepherds found him. Verse 11 is quite clear that the Wise Men visit a house, the dwelling of the tiny miracle we call the Christ Child over which the guiding star had stopped. This is how we know that some time has passed between the birth of the Christ Child and the visit of the Wise Men. How long, no

one is quite sure. The Scriptures tell us that they “observed the star at its rising,” presumably on the night Christ was born. Deciding to follow the star, these three very inquisitive gentlemen then had to organize their trips and undertake the journey itself. Walking all the way (the camels often imagined as part of their entourage are nowhere in Scripture), it would have taken them months to travel from points in the Middle East to the lonely outpost at Bethlehem. Of course, Matthew tells us they stopped to see King Herod assuming he would know all about the star and the event it heralded, but he didn’t. However, his suspicions about a possible usurper were kindled and, while he was outwardly nice to the Wise Men, they did not trust him and did not return to tell him of the child’s location once they found him.

So, where does all this leave us this morning on Epiphany Sunday – the Sunday that commemorates this event which announces from the very heavens that the world has changed forever with the birth of this child? Well, I would say it leaves us right where we’ve always been – right in the middle of our busy, sometimes messy, frequently challenging, often incredibly wonderful lives. But now things are different. Things are different because Epiphany has changed everything! Epiphany has arrived once again inviting us to join the Wise Men once more in their quest for understanding of, for connection with, this unbelievable event of God-with-us that is Christmas. Epiphany

itself has come to mean a moment of deep understanding, an experience of something that had been confusing suddenly making sense in a way it never has before. Epiphany, dear friends, is God's gift to us as the Christmas season draws to a close and another year begins.

That's why in our church, we have begun the tradition of Star Sunday on Epiphany Sunday. For those of you who are new to this tradition, the premise is a simple one. On this Sunday, everyone receives a "Star Word" along with an invitation to pay attention to how this word makes itself manifest in one's life. These Star Words are individual invitations from God to you to look for God's presence in your life in a particular way. Perhaps your Star Word offers a suggestion of something you need to work on to understand God and what's happening in your life more clearly. Perhaps your Star Word is a gift of acknowledgement of something already happening and a reminder to pay attention to how that something is changing your life. The point is that your Star Word is a gift to you from God. I believe, we believe, that the Word which comes to you today is intended for you in this moment in your life. You may not understand it or why "this word" but, I promise, if you just rest with it, holding it in your heart, how this word is God's gift to you will become clear.

Traditionally, this is an interactive Sunday and, once again, you will be invited to engage in conversation with the people

around you. Move if you need to! We'll begin our conversation now as you share with each other what your Star Word was for last year and how it played a role in your life last year. If you were not here last year to receive a Star Word, no worries! We'll take a moment right now for you to think about what one word most describes your life and your approach to it this past year. That was your Star Word for 2019! You just didn't know it. For those of you who did have a Star Word that you remember, take a moment now to recall its role in your life. .... Okay? Let's chat! ....

Wonderful! Hear anything especially interesting you feel comfortable sharing? ... Okay, time to move on to this year's Star Words! First, we'll take a moment to bless these words for this year. (*Blessing Prayer*) Now, Claire and I will pass them out to you. Just reach in the bowl and pick one! Something is new this year, though. I have folded the papers with the words facing out in case you feel the need to make sure you don't get the same word yet again. If you don't want to see the words, just close your eyes as you pick! Okay, here goes! ....

May your Star Word reveal itself in your life as God's special gift to you, a unique reminder that God is paying attention to you, that God loves you beyond all reason, that God never leaves you lost and alone. May our amazing, loving and merciful God walk with you every moment of every day of this New Year gift 2020. Amen.

