

The Reverend Kathy Boss
All Saints' Episcopal Church, Littleton, NH
Sermon
January 2, 2022
Second Sunday of Christmas, All Years
"Epiphany"

[Jeremiah 31:7-14](#)

[Psalms 84](#)

[Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a](#)

[Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Happy New Year!! I hope you all had a wonderful day yesterday. This is a special week—we celebrate the beginning of a new year and this Thursday, the 6th, we celebrate Epiphany. In some churches they might be looking at each other and thinking—Epiphany—what?! Not us Anglicans! Well, maybe a little.

Do you all remember chalking your doors last year (C, M, B for the traditional names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. And also to abbreviate the Latin words *Christus mansi(ee)-o-nem benedi(ee)cat*, "May Christ bless the house.)—Epiphany! The "twelfth day of Christmas"? Epiphany! But maybe without the twelve drummers drumming. And "We Three Kings of Orient Are"—Epiphany!

According to Britannica, Catholics, Anglicans, and Lutherans are the few Western Christian denominations that celebrate this holiday. And, let's be honest, it's not a huge one for us Episcopalians, despite our Anglican family.

It's too bad. Because it is such a perfect holiday antidote to the frenzy that Christmas so often becomes, and to the reminiscences of an old year, and hopes of a new one. Just as we enter this between space, just as we are trying to understand what was revealed in the past year, and make sense for the next one, as the celebrations and visits wrap up, just then, if we make room for it, if we look up at that star and follow it, past wealth and power, to the humble child, comes Epiphany.

Epiphany—the manifestation of the divine. The manifestation of the divine.

I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty good to me right now.

So, today, let's dive into the Epiphany story, let's reclaim a little bit of that tradition and see where it takes us.

We Three Kings of Orient Are—This was one of my absolute favorite hymns as a child, along with "Good King Wenceslas." (I had a bit of a soft spot for Kings, princesses, and princes.)

But let's, for now, set aside that Kingly image of those wise men at Jesus's cradle. Because, as so often is the case, there is a more humble, and, I think, compelling interpretation of who these people were. An interpretation that asserts that there were only two kings in this story—Herod and Jesus. And only one true king, Jesus. And gives us a lovely image of epiphany.

These Magi, for this is what they were called in the original Greek, these mysterious people mentioned by Matthew, were mentioned in other parts of the Bible. And they were not kings, they were Zoroastrian priests, astrologers, interpreters of dreams, consultants to kings, and thorns in king's sides. Gentiles, pagans, outsiders.

These Magi have seen in the stars the birth of the king of the Jews. They go first, as it seems logical they would, to the center of power where they would expect him to be. But he is not there. Not where the power is. In fact he is far from it, and in going to the seat of power to find him, they have tipped off the jealous and ruthless king of Judea, Herod. Not a great start to Epiphany, but it's okay, it gets better.

These Magi have travelled a very long way following the stars, all the way from Persia, the seat of Zoroastrianism, which is, by the way, one of the oldest continuously practiced religions in the world (older than Judaism).

The journey would have been close to 1000 miles. I have walked 500 miles. It took me 40 hard days. They would likely have been travelling in a large caravan including whole families, selling goods and services along the way, stopping for their religious services, and for rest. And now they learn they have still farther to go. But there is a new king, a revelation in the stars, something they have yet to understand, and they go to meet him, to pay him homage

These “wise men” are monotheistic, believe in a messiah, heaven and hell, and judgement after death. However, there is also much that makes them different from the Jews, from Jesus and the people to whom he was born, including their belief in astrology. Though it was the stars that led them to Jesus, it is unclear whether they went expecting a messiah, or whether they missed the significance of their question. Herod and the priests of Jerusalem certainly hit on it right away, it was straight out of their tradition—king of the jews, messiah.

So, here we have these Zoroastrian priests come to meet Jesus, thinking that they were going to find a king, for this is what was revealed to them, following a tradition foreign to Jews, reading the stars.

These religious seekers are drawn to pay homage to the King of the Jews revealed in the stars. To these gentiles, others, God reveals the location of the Messiah.

Then the star stops and they arrive. The moment they are outside of the house where Jesus lies, they are overwhelmed with joy! Already they feel it, the presence of God. When they enter the house they see “the child with Mary his mother,” this humble house. They know that they are in the presence of something wondrous, God made manifest in the flesh, in this beautiful child. And they know in that moment what they must do, what is expected of them, what it all means, why the star has brought them here. So much joy!

They pay homage and they offer their gifts—gifts taken from their caravan, most likely, inspired by their sudden understanding of what must be done in by the manifestation of God before them. They bring Gold because they know him to be king, myrrh for the suffering he will endure, and frankincense as a sign of his holiness. So much light! So much hope!

This is Epiphany.

A revelation to people who are seekers, and often outsiders, a journey, a misdirection, and finally, an arrival at an unexpected place where the divine breaks in.

So let's lean into Epiphany this year, let's remember those magi and this powerful story of the divine breaking in. Chalk your doors with the lovely kits put together by your fellow parishioners, sing We Three Kings Loud and clear, maybe even do a little drumming on that twelfth day.

Let's invite Christ into our homes, Christus Manionus Benedictus. Take the revelations of 2021, the ugly and the beautiful, the despairing and the hopeful. Seek out meaning, make the journey, be willing to make mistakes, and when you find that place of joy, rejoice, and walk through that door bearing your gifts to witness God in the world. This is Epiphany. Let's Epiph!!