

**Good Shepherd Episcopal Church**

**200 State Rt 23**

**Wantage, Sussex, New Jersey 07461**

**1-973-875-0919**

**Eve of The Epiphany (A)**

**January 5, 2020**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**“Keep our star shining brightly”**

**DRAFT**

**The Holy Gospel according to**

**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.

Create in us clean hearts, Lord Christ, and sustain us by your Holy Spirit. Amen .

Sermon for Epiphany (A)

S010520—Epiphany-A--Matthew-2—vv1-12 at <http://www.sjnj.com>

About eight years ago amateur British astronomer Dominic Ford who is the editor of the website, [In-The-Sky.org](http://In-The-Sky.org), published the course of the brightest planet Venus in the Western sky for latitudes which included the towns of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and his data showed that indeed the planet Venus rose in the west and moved downward from 22 degrees in the sky to about 16 degrees in the sky from March 1 through May 1 (for the years 1900 – 2100 which includes this year 2020), and his data possibly can be generalized to similar time apparent movement of the bright planet

Venus in the year 6 BC when Jesus was born. It may well be that this apparent ‘downward trajectory’ toward Earth’s surface of this brightest object in the sky Venus could have been what the magi were seeing and following at the time of Jesus birth.

<https://in-the-sky.org/article.php?term=venus>

[https://www.google.com/search?q=latitude+of+bethlehem&rlz=1C1CAFA\\_enUS608US609&oq=latitude+of+bethlehem&aqs=chro](https://www.google.com/search?q=latitude+of+bethlehem&rlz=1C1CAFA_enUS608US609&oq=latitude+of+bethlehem&aqs=chro)

[me..69i57j0l3.5141j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.in-the-sky.org/about.php)

[Dominic Ford ‘works on the Exoplanet Analysis System for the European Space Agency's forthcoming PLATO mission, which is scheduled for launch in 2026. He is based at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge, UK, where he works with Nicholas Walton’:]

<https://in-the-sky.org/about.php>

How the magi got to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem is still much a matter of

conjecture, but the impact of these magi has changed the religious architecture of the world for over a third of all inhabitants on earth, Christians everywhere on our planet. We hear this story of the magi every Christmas and Epiphany, and the famous star of the magi adorns almost every Christmas tree and crèche scene on our planet. To say that these magi made an earth changing discovery is a gross understatement. The magi discovered the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Most High of the Most High, Jesus Christ, Only Son of the Highest God. In Him we live and

move and have all our being; in Jesus is our foundational hope, in Jesus Christ we have been delivered from every sin so we can appear blameless at the throne of God when we die. In Jesus we find the bedrock of our being and of the meaning of everything. We do not follow an equation, we do not follow a world leader, we Christians have our one loyalty, to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master. So. indeed in him we live and move and have our being. All else pales beside this one fact of belief that all Christians have.

The second observation we have of these magi was that they gave the Christ Child

gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh, valuable commodities then in the first century as they still are. Thank heaven the baby Jesus did not have to go into life alone, without fanfare, and without the monetary needs of his family. Many think the Holy Family escaped to Egypt a short time later by using the gold given to them by the magi. That seems very reasonable to me. Even though we Christians occasionally decorate our sacred utensils and other items with gold, we are always cognizant of the need to provide gold to those whose lives depend on ours, we who have some of that gold. We

are the ones who need to step up to the needs of the world and to be sure others have food and shelter and clothing. Even in our equanimous culture many still suffer hunger and cold, but we give to help them on every occasion, or we should give help. Of course, we are as beset as others by billfold paralysis, that not uncommon disease of the haves who are not the have nots. It is our gifts to others in need that make our world and our community habitable. And we give valuable time when needed, to supply a human face and hands to those in need of healing and care and love.

It is by our love that the rest of the world knows whom we serve. And we become beacons for others to give generously, not grudgingly. Let us not give in to billfold paralysis.

Gift giving is so much a part of Christmas that we frequently forget the first gifts of love in our faith were to the Christ Child. We still lay before Him our tithes and offerings every church service, Sundays included. And our congregation leaders use what we give to help wherever we can as a corporate group. And do remember your church in your will as well.

Our denomination, perhaps along with many others, have an obligatory contract when we get married to care for our babies and children by having a will that will care for our children and our families in the case of our untimely or timely demise. Every Episcopal clergy person is also to remind the parents of a new baby that they are to have such a will naming the baby as our beneficiary. This rubric is in our Book of Common Prayer on Page 445, and I will read it to you: “The Minister of the Congregation is directed to instruct the people, from time to time, about the duty of

Christian parents to make prudent provision for the well-being of their families, and of all persons to make wills, while they are in health, arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, not neglecting, if they are able, to leave bequests for religious and charitable uses.”

So, when we admire the gifts of the magi, let us so too remember the gifts we need to arrange for others, including our family and our children. We may or may not have gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but we surely have something that needs to be shared with those

who are in our care, including our own congregations and the charities we support.

In our wealthy world where almost everyone seems to have at least one if not more automobiles and homes, we need to be cognizant of what those who do not have these luxuries face daily and particularly in times of trouble. How can we provide for those whose lives are lived constantly at the edge? What would Christ have us learn from his gift givers today?

A profound astronomical event led the magi to search for and find the Christ Child. This was no common pilgrimage, but it

became a model for all of us to ‘put our money where our mouth is’ to set us aright this new year.

My hope for us is that 2020 is the best ever for our congregation and all our families. This place is a sacred site that shines as a beacon for many, many others. Keep our star shining brightly.

Amen.

Description: Our resources parallel those of the magi, even if we do not have gold, frankincense, or myrrh. We all have something to share with others in need. And we need to have a written provision at all times for our children and families.

Tags: Epiphany, magi, gifts, gold, frankincense, myrrh, Venus, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, star, care, children, families, church, need, share, beacon, Episcopal, prayer, rubric, space

## Other resources for Epiphany:

[https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003379/the\\_light\\_within\\_all\\_life](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003379/the_light_within_all_life)

The Light Within All Life

Sunday January 06, 2013

The Rev. Dr. John Philip Newell

Organization: Not available

Denomination: Other

Epiphany of the Lord - Year C

Matthew 2:1-12

...our Gospel story points to something radically different, that there is Light beyond our inherited boundaries, and that we need this Light, that it is given to complete the Light we have received, not to compete with the Light we have received. We need one another as nations and religions as much as the species of the Earth need one another to be whole.



Mary Oliver, the Pulitzer Prize winning poet, in 'Six Recognitions of our Lord' writes of such a moment. 'Then,' she says, 'I go back to ... my own house, my own life, which has now become brighter and simpler, somewhere I have never been before.' I think the wise men in returning home saw everything more brightly. The Light they had found in a distant land turned out to be the Light at the heart of their own land.

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_discovering.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_discovering.htm)

Edward F. Markquart

info@sfs.com

Merry Christmas. Merry twelfth day of Christmas. Christmas is twelve days long. From Dec. 25th to Jan. 6th. In the Western Christian Church based in Rome, Christmas begins on Dec. 25th. In the Eastern Christian Church based in Constantinople (Istanbul), it begins on Jan. 6. So which of the two days should we celebrate the birth of Christ? Dec. 25th or Jan. 6th? We have reached a compromise; thus we have the twelve days of Christmas.



That is, I want you to write down on your bulletin or worship registration card five gifts that God has given you. Please.

Everyone. If not, you will spend the rest of 1998 in a Lutheran purgatory and who would want to do that. So everyone, children too, write down five gifts that God has given you, knowing that you have been given hundreds. Remember gifts are talents, abilities, aptitudes, events that have happened to you, some tragic, some great, it's the sum total of all the resources that God has been giving to you throughout your lifetime. .... Now, would two or three of you share your lists. ... (Discussion). ... Now, when you go home after church, I would be appreciative if you would ask someone who knows you to add five more gifts to your list that God has given you. That way the sermon can continue.



[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_shootingstars.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_shootingstars.htm)

The Wisemen came from Persia. The year was 7 B.C. That year, there was an unusual movement of planets in the sky. Jupiter, the large planet, was moving in conjunction with Saturn, the star that symbolized the protection of Israel. These scientific astrologers asked, "What does this mean? What does this star mean for us?" We ask the same question today, "What does this Star mean for us?"



[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_b\\_where\\_did\\_christ\\_mas\\_go.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_where_did_christ_mas_go.htm)

...we ask one last question: where did Jesus go?

A young child asked the question of his mother, “Mommy, did the baby Jesus live happily ever after? Did the story have a happy ending?”

Well, the story did not end in Bethlehem. There was a murder of innocent children by the monstrous King Herod who killed all the little boys two years and younger. There was the flight to Egypt; then the return to Nazareth where Jesus grew up in a carpenter’s shop. There was his great ministry: his parables, his teachings, his miracles. Then there was the arrest, the trial, the painful execution, the resurrection, the ascension into heaven. And finally, more recently, the Spirit of Jesus came to Seattle and Des Moines and Kent and Federal Way and all of south King County. For more than two thousand years, Jesus is still bringing the Presence of God, peace, justice and mercy, filling us with the experience of grace and gracious love.

Where did Jesus go? Into your heart and mine. Into your life and mine. Where did Jesus go after Christmas day? His Spirit of God’s grace and peace are now in you, as you return to your fields, glorifying and praising God.

We began this sermon by asking: Where did Christmas go? Too often, Christmas goes into the attic for one more year, boxed up and put away for another twelve months. But...the shepherds went back to their fields, glorifying and praising God. The wise men? They went back to their countries, families and friends...wiser and lighter. And Jesus? He has come to live in your heart and mine.



<https://www.agreeley.com/hom08/jan06.htm>

<https://www.agreeley.com/homilies96/jan0796.html>

Andrew Greeley, 1996

January 6th

Feast of the Epiphany

Mt. 2/1-12

Background

During the early years of Christianity, the Greeks celebrated the incarnation as a festival of the "manifestation" (epiphanos) of God in Jesus on January 6 while the western Church celebrated it as the feast of Jesus's birth on December 25. Eventually the two feasts became combined. In the west the time between them became "Twelfth Night" as in the "Twelve Days of Christmas." This lovely custom has been eroded by our modern practice of starting the Christmas celebration at Thanksgiving or more recently at November 1. The liturgists, never too swift, destroyed the custom altogether (as well as violating more than a millennium of history) by making "Little Christmas" a wild card always to be celebrated on a Sunday. They also eliminated the three "manifestations" of Jesus - to the kings, at his baptism in the Jordan, and at the marriage feast of Cana. All that remains is the Festival of the Kings, twelve if we are to accept the Greek version (are there not twelve tribes of Israel and twelve apostles?). The "kings" who were more likely astrologers tell us a story of Jesus coming for all humankind, a story with richer and deeper implications today than at the time of the Gospels.

## STORY

*This is the story for those who miss the point.*

(This homily series rarely repeats itself but there is only one story that should be told on this festival, and that is the magical story of Babuksa.)

Once upon a time there lived in Bethlehem a woman named Babushka. She kept the cleanest and neatest house in town and was also the best cook. She heard rumors of three kings coming across the desert but paid no attention to them because she had so much work to do. Then she heard the sounds of drums and pipes and a cavalcade of riders. She looked out the window and there were three richly dressed kings coming towards her house. They told her that they had come to honor the little prince who had been born in Bethlehem and they needed food and lodging. Babushka cooked a wonderful meal for them, remade all the beds, and wore herself out. The next morning the kings begged her to come with them so she too might see the little prince. Babushka said she would follow after them as soon as she finished the dishes. She cleaned the house again and then took out of a cabinet the toys of her own little prince who had died so long ago. She had no more need of them and would give them to the new little prince. She put them in a basket and sat down for a moment's rest before she followed the wise men.

Hours later she woke up, grabbed the basket, and rushed into town. But the kings were gone and so was the little prince and his parents. Ever after, it is said, Babushka has followed after them. Whenever she finds a newborn babe, she looks to see if he is the little prince. Even if he (or in our days she too) is not there, Babushka leaves a toy for the child. I think she probably found the prince early on, but we still should learn from her

lesson: we should never let the important interfere with the essential.

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SermonWriter

From: Dick Donovan <dick@sermonwriter.com>

Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2019 8:22 PM

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Subject: SermonWriter: Jan. 5 (Epiphany A) Matthew 2:1-12

<https://sermonwriter.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2020-01-05-EpiphanyABC.doc>

I am reminded of a story about a great violinist. People came to hear him, in part, because he owned a Stradivarius. Some people thought that he played well only because he owned a Stradivarius. Some people wondered if they might not play equally well if they owned a Stradivarius.

But then one night the violinist stopped in the middle of a concert and smashed his violin against the floor. The audience

gasped in horror—but then the violinist explained. He had heard the rumors. He knew that some people thought his violin was great but that he was not. Now that he had played part of his concert, he would show them that he didn't need a Stradivarius. He picked up another violin and began playing—playing wonderfully.

It was only after he had played the rest of the concert that he told the audience the rest of the story. The violin that he had smashed was not the Stradivarius but an inexpensive instrument that he had picked up in a second-hand store. The violin that he held in his hand was the Stradivarius. The audience had enjoyed the first part of the concert, played on the ordinary violin, as well as they had enjoyed the second part, played on the Stradivarius. It wasn't the violin that made the difference, but the master who played it.

And so it isn't the expense of our gifts that count—but the Master to whom we give them—the Master who transforms ordinary gifts into wonderful gifts—gifts to change the world. The little child singing in a Christmas pageant might not make great music, but her singing touches our souls. The Sunday school teacher who loves Jesus, by God's grace, sets young lives on the right pathway. The person whose only gift is gardening—

—or sweeping—or polishing—or washing dishes—by God's grace, makes the church a more beautiful, more hospitable place for all of us.

This is the start of a new year. It is a good time to take stock. Consider this week what you can give to Jesus. Then determine to give him the best that you have, whatever that is, great or small—and trust that he will do something wonderful with it.

Give him your life. If you start by giving Jesus your life, nothing that you give him will ever be too grand or too small. Give him your heart—then watch to see how he magnifies your gifts to change people's lives—to change the world.

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