

I'm not usually one for star gazing. Every so often, I'll look up to the night sky and take in the vastness of it all, but for the most part, I don't make it a hobby to follow the stars in the sky. That is, until just a few weeks ago, when Saturn and Jupiter were aligning in the sky to form what appeared to be a super star. Some even called it the Bethlehem Star. And I have to say that for a non-star gazer like myself, it was pretty cool. But perhaps what made it even more amazing was the fact that this phenomenon hasn't been seen like this for over 800 years! The planets align every 20 years, but it's not always visible to the naked eye like it was recently. And in 1623, the alignment came right as the sun was setting, so you couldn't really see it then either. No, the last time this happened was in 1226 – before Martin Luther, before Notre Dame was even finished.

It's incredible to think that we were able to witness such an event, when so few have before. But maybe what's even more incredible is the 800 years of history that has spanned the gap between the recurrence of this event. Certainly a lot has changed since then, but what seemingly hasn't is the power of a cosmic event to shake us out of our normal routines and just take in the moment. Now, I don't know if this was Bethlehem's Star or not – I don't think anyone can know for certain. But perhaps this rare event comes at the perfect moment, not because it has to be the same star, but because of the connection we have to a story about a star. And how that star led to big things, big changes, and big hope.

To the earliest listeners to Matthew's Gospel, this would seem to be the most bizarre of stories. Wise men, star gazers, coming from some other country, wanting to pay homage to a child, who they believe is King of the Jews. First of all, astrology wasn't really accepted practice in Israel, so these wise men would have been considered foolish and would have been looked down upon. Second, they come all the way to Bethlehem because of something they saw in the stars. I mean, most of us look at the stars and think, cool. But we're not about to travel great distances because of something we saw in the night sky. And third, they recognize the baby as the king of Israel and want to bring him gifts, gifts that make sense symbolically, but practically, they are things that no

new parents would have any use for. They have nothing to do with Israel, so why the sudden interest in this new king?

Because the story really isn't so much about the gifts the magi bring. It's about the star. It's about the journey that that star led them on. Growing up, I received many of my life lessons from 3 sources: my parents, my teachers and pastors, and Tim Taylor's next-door-neighbor Wilson from the TV show Home Improvement. Wilson, always quick with a "Hidey ho neighbor", was known for giving Tim and his family advice. Often times, Tim doesn't understand it, but it always seems to work out in the end. In one episode, Wilson tells Tim a story about gifts. He says, "There once was a little boy in Africa who wanted to give his teacher a gift, but he had no money. So he walked two days to the ocean and he picked up a handful of sand and walked two days back, and he gave it to her. She was greatly moved by the gift. But she said, 'It's so far for you to walk.' And he said, 'Teacher, the journey was part of the gift.'"

The journey is part of the gift. The wise men bring the baby Jesus gifts fit for a king, but the star has provided something more – an even better, more important gift – a journey. A journey to the baby Jesus, Immanuel. This star led the magi on a journey to the Savior of all people. It is not the magi that come to Jesus, but God who comes to the magi in the form of a star, calling them to something new.

And maybe this most recent super star can be a similar reminder for all of us. Not seen like this for over 800 years, perhaps it comes as a timely reminder of the eternal presence of God, leading us on a journey to experience the newness of life. We are all on a journey. The journey is never easy – it certainly wasn't for the magi – but the journey shapes us and makes us who we are. We journey through life, following the one who has called us. We are not taking this journey alone and we are not wandering aimlessly. We need not fear getting lost or left behind for there is always a star. It may not be a star in the sky like the magi had, but we all have stars in our lives – people and experiences that have shaped us and guided us, leading us once again to a place of hope and peace, love and joy, a place of new life. A place where we realize God is with us, that God has always been with us. A place

where we realize that it isn't our gifts we bring, but God's gift to us in the form of a journey that will always lead us into newness of life through Christ. If only we look to the stars. Amen.

### **Announcements**

- + **Annual Meeting** – An early reminder to save the date for January 31<sup>st</sup>, as we hold our annual meeting via zoom. More details to come, stay connected with the E-News
- + **Thanks** – Xmas gifts and cards
- + **Sunday School Boxes** – Today is the day when you get to open and enjoy our new Sunday School Boxes! Stef Hawley has put together some awesome and creative ideas for you to engage with the Sunday School lesson each week. If you are interested in getting a box for future months, please contact Stefanie.

### **Prayers of the People**

Gracious God, you have brought us once again to this season of Epiphany. Reveal to us your love born in the manger. Help us to recognize the importance of this moment, when you took on human flesh and became as one of us. As we journey through this season of revelation, help us to realize who you are and what your presence does to us and the world we live in. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God, you have called each of here, inviting us on this journey of faith. May we find comfort in your promise to be with us and lead us, may we have the courage to follow, and may we have the wisdom to acknowledge what we do not know or understand. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God, we pray for the world that you have created. Renew it, restore it, and bring about new life in this place. Help us to see one another as fellow journeyers through life. Teach us to treat one another with respect, fill our hearts with empathy for others, and show us how to love one another as you have loved us. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

God, you have called us to this place to love and serve all people here. May we help those who are in need, treating them with grace and dignity. Be with those who are sick or injured and in need of your care and lead us to be your presence to those in our heart and minds this day, remembering especially, Vanessa Kautzman & Chuck McBride, Jena Williams, Gary Carlson, Janet Haupt, Cody McNally & Olivia Polzer, Virgil Hendrickson, and the family of Marcia Snook. Comfort them, provide for them, and remember them, O God. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, Gracious God, we lift to you these prayers and all the prayers of our hearts today. These prayers are part of our journey and so we entrust them to you just as we entrust our whole lives to you. Guide us in this week. Strengthen us for the work ahead of us. May our vocations and ministries shine the light of Christ that you have given to us, that all may know and

experience your love through Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Lord. Amen.