In the words of Isaiah 60:  
“Arise Shine, for your light has come.”

The OT prophets and NT writers often use light as a metaphor. Good one.

Light is powerful. Can affect our moods and emotions.

* We notice it this time of year, when the sun’s only up for a few hours and the nights are long, and it’s hard to get outside to soak up natural light.
* Dec darkness is decorated with twinkling lights, but Jan just feels dark…
* When cloudy for a few days…

Light (NB not only for our emotions) also reveals things:

* Gives depth and contrast
* Illuminates fine details (sewing/puzzles…)
* Sometimes that’s good, sometimes we’d rather not
* My house doesn’t appear to need cleaning when the lights are faint
* Ex: ever wondered why romantic dinners are always in dim light/candlelight? We all look a pretty good when our image is blurred

Light brings out the truth.

Denial thrives in the darkness.

It’s why its better to play hide and seek in the dark, = easier to be sneaky.

For the same reason, we have street lights/ security lights = devious, nasty things use obscurity for concealment.

While light reveals truth, darkness can mean ignorance

being “in the dark” = not knowing something

Unscrupulous people do not like their business details out in the light

The prophets beckoned people to the light, in order to understand God AND to expose injustice

So that they could live in truth and the way of God

A star in the night, is a symbolic and ideal means to herold the way to the Messiah /Jesus

Today’s Scripture: Matthew 2 1-12

The scene begins with Herod. A king who was a power hungry, nefarious ruler who had sidled up to the Roman conquerors in order to rule his own people, the Jews. (not popular/loved)

A king who thru deception, conniving, and later murder clings onto the darkness

When he was frightened =all of Jerusalem was frightened with him

Maybe that was why no one else seemed to see the bright light in the sky/ the star

(Maybe they were afraid to see/recognize the light =dangerous to safety)

Yet the star shone in the darkness

A few zoroastrian priests from the east saw the light in the night

They were mystics, people of enlightenment, who searched and asked questions (much speculation…calling magi or wise men is enough)

They saw the star

Profound: THE LIGHT was given to and received by outsiders, non Jews, not christians, not people considered to be part of the chosen family of God.

What does that tell us about God?

Why should we ever doubt that God would speak to us, send us signs, give us epiphanies, and shining stars. We are told over and over that G can work though any unlikely character, so why not also us?

So, these Magi accept the gift of the star, and they set out to travel a great distance, to seek out this new king/ruler who the Hebrew scriptures said would shepherd the people of Israel.

And on the way they share their epiphany with King Herod,

* Who then tells all his chief priests and scribes
* They dig through the Hebrew scriptures and find that Bethlehem is said to be the place where this new ruler will come from.

What I find curious, is that while all of these scholars of the hebrew scriptures, these learned priests who worship God and Jews, don’t also flock to Bethlehem to find this Messiah.

Haven’t they been waiting for him too?

Why aren’t they joining the wise men and travelling to Bethlehem as well?

* The text gives us one clue to that Q.
* It says not only Herod was afraid, but all of Jerusalem with him
* They were afraid of Herod, and the Roman power behind him, who had zero interest, or in fact a very negative interest in anyone claiming to be a new king.
* If you are talking about a newborn king, you are talking about insurrection against Rome.
* Showing interest in a newborn king might get you killed. So maybe the scribes were just as happy to stay put, thank you very much. This epiphany would have cost them too much, so they don’t follow through with it.

Yet Herod believes this epiphany. He believes it so much so that when he doesn’t know where this Jesus is, he orders all the baby boys 2 years and under in and around Bethlehem to be slaughtered.

And so though many received the epiphany, only the magi end up worshipping Jesus in Bethlehem. Only they followed the light.

Illumination usually is transformative. Having an epiphany, usually makes you change how you do something, see something, understand the world …brings change

Change tends to open a gateway to the unknown.

Following a star to who knows where demands faith. Faith in an ultimate being who is showing a better way.

Yet change is risky, because of the uncertainty it brings, and with that fear.

I saw a quote that said: “**That which you most need will be found where you least want to look**.” (Karl Young)

Isn’t that the faith that we are each invited into? We are invited to follow a God into an unknown future, to trust and obey? To follow the light of God’s leading even when (or especially when) we don’t know where it will lead us

The magi followed this same call, and showed up for their journey.

There’s an old book by Henry Van Dyke called the Story of the Other Wise Man. I saw it adapted as a play in Meacham (Dancing Sky Theatre 2019)

And it chronicles a magi who misses the caravan to Jerusalem because he stops to help an ill man on the side of the road. He still travels to Bethlehem, but he’s missed the holy family, who has fled to Egypt, and he’s missed his magi friends, who have gone home by another road.

He goes to Egypt and searches for Jesus in the refugee camps and settlements. He ministers to those he encounters on the way, even as it delays his search for the child. He spends the gifts he’d brought for the baby to feed people, to free people, to care for people.

Finally, 33 years later, he’s back in Jerusalem as Jesus is about to be crucified. The magi is headed to the cross and encounters yet one more person who needs his help. He’s feeling a failure, having missed the king he’s been looking to give homage to his whole life, when God speaks to him, thanking him for his gifts.

The wise man responds with “Lord, when was it that I saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that I saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that I saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” quoting a passage from the end of Matthew’s gospel in chapter 25.

And God responds to this other magi, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

It occurs to me that Matthew 25 is the way the author of this gospel invites us to follow the star.

We too missed the original caravan. Yet the work of our lives is to follow the star in search of the Christ, so we can show up and help the people we encounter.

The star doesn’t promise we’ll always see the path clearly, or know where we’re headed.

So our invitation in this new year: is to show up for the journey, ministering to those we meet along the way. To arise, shine, for our light has come. Let us follow the light.

I’m going to give us all a tool this morning, maybe more of a walking stick, or a little star to follow.

STAR WORDS

* Each to take a printed star word
* Consider how God might be speaking to you this year thru this word
* Did this last year
  + Care group sharing
  + Maybe forgotten next day
* Imagine that God is picking out a word for you rather than you picking
* Put up in a regular place you will see it
* You may:
  + Pray with it
  + Meditate on it
  + Look it up in dictionary or in scripture
  + May it lead you to what God is dreaming for up for you