

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Marshall, WI**  
**The Epiphany of Our Lord + January 5 and 8, 2020**  
Pastor [Nancy M. Raabe](#) + [Matthew 2:1-12](#)



“We Three Kings,” we’ll sing in a few minutes. The wise men, we know them as. But the mysterious visitors who traveled hundreds of miles from Persia to Bethlehem weren’t necessarily three and they weren’t necessarily men, at least, all men. The Greek noun for them is “magi,” which is plural and gender neutral. And they were not kings but wise guys, or girls. They were actually magicians, or illusionists, in the Persian royal court. “Magi” is the root of our word, “magic.” They were servants of the Persian king, entertainers and their job mission was to entertain and divert.

Why did God choose *them* for this mission of traveling hundreds of miles to worship the Christ child and present him with gifts? Why doesn’t Matthew make a big deal about the townspeople of Bethlehem? Didn’t they get it?

The answer is: No. Let’s think now of the first two groups of people who responded to the news of Jesus’ birth with worship and adoration. It was not the priests, the local rulers, the townspeople. Nobody of high rank, no important person. It was shepherds – the lowest of all professions -- and magi, strangers from a different land and culture.

It’s clear what the message is here: That the birth of Christ is for EVERYONE. Not just for God’s chosen people, the Israelites, not just for students of the scriptures, but for all people—especially those from foreign lands and far-off places. Christ has come

for those who live under bridges or in the cars, for those whose earthly possessions fit into two plastic bags. Christ has come for each of us, no matter what successes we enjoy in life or what failures we suffer. God in flesh, blood and bone has broken into history to enter into each human life with a love that rescues us from the terrible fear of death, a love from which nothing can separate us.

And what is the sign that this is so? That the light of Christ shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not and will never overcome it.

As we move into these weeks of Epiphany, a word that means “manifestation,” I invite you to open yourself to ways in which Christ’s light shines in our world. And prepare to be surprised.

Last week, for example, I was staring absent-mindedly at our scrawny tree that we got barely in time for Christmas. It was the last one on the lot and its branches were already turning brown. Nothing we did could get it to stand up straight. On top we attached the same simple lighted star that we’ve used for as long as I can remember. As I sat there, I noticed the star was facing both east and west. Words from hymns we’re singing today flowed into my head: “Star of the east, the horizon adorning...westward leading, still proceeding....” Suddenly this old plastic star began to burn with purpose. It spoke of hope in the midst of the increasing uncertainty of our time. It spoke of a future that is getting harder and harder to imagine: What kind of world will our children and grandchildren inherit? It spoke of an enduring love in the face of those who live in fear

and act in hate. Fear and hate are the coward's choices. It takes courage to practice love.

Where can you find this light? We must begin in the darkness. It was dark outside when I was gazing at our tree. It was dark when the magi first looked up and saw the star. This was probably not a comet, or a supernova, or some other great cosmic event; no scientist yet has conclusively linked it to one. In all likelihood it was just a star, the brightest star in the sky, just the star Sirius, which you can see now in the evening just below Orion. At the moment it's 4 times brighter than any other star in the sky.

The magi looked up. They saw the star. An object in the night sky, which must have which seemed ordinary others, changed their lives. It called to them across light years. It called of a hope and a future. It called to them of great joy that burned in their hearts in ways they'd never experienced. They had to find out what this was all about. So off they went, maybe on camels and maybe not, laden with gifts for who they knew not. And the star led them to the place where Jesus lay.

The light of Christ is always shining. Follow that light, even if the trip through your soul takes you on a hazardous journey across hundreds of miles, over challenging terrain, to places you've never been before. For at the end of the journey you will find yourself just where the magi did—in a place of great warmth, bathed in the golden glow of divine love, kneeling before the Christ child. You have arrived at the center of God's own heart, where the night and the day are both alike. God desires nothing more than to welcome you there—to welcome you home. Amen.