

# *“Light Shine”*

*Epiphany*

*Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12,  
Matthew 2:1-12*

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From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Epiphany, January 6, 2019, dedicated our Sr. Deacon, Janet Newcity who has done a phenomenal job in a tough year, to James “Papa” Kee, Sr. as he enters eternal life, to Jeffrey and Jasmine and to all his family in heaven and on earth, to all the searchers and seekers after the truth and always to Glory of God!

*“Light Shine”*

*Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12,  
Matthew 2:1-12*

Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. The day we have all been waiting for – when the song ends. You know the one with 12 drummers drumming which was the build-up from pipers piping, lords leaping, ladies dancing, maids milking, swans swimming, geese laying, golden rings, calling birds, French hens, turtle doves and one partridge - in a pear tree. We can give it a rest for a year...

With the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas comes Epiphany. The day when the Magi come calling. The day of light breaks in the darkness. The day of the fulfillment and completion of the Christmas story. The day the journey to the manger ends and the new journey begins all over again.

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

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A journey is a trip of considerable cost, time, and value which carries with its life changes in the process. A journey is not something we do “round and about.” It is soulful, thoughtful, prayerful, and often transformative and meaningful in ways we never imagined possible before we started out.

Consider what it means to start out on a journey. At an elemental level, it means getting up, moving out, putting one foot ahead of the other, leg over leg, step over step making a thud on the earth and moving in a particular direction. Starting out on a journey always begins with direction of some sort and some means of travel— whether it is by foot, by camel, by horse, by bike, by car, by plane, or train, we have to leave one place and head somewhere else. In our leaving, our point of origin disappears behind us and we travel to another spot which has been determined by maps, GPS flight plans or a soulful or heartfelt guesstimate and some internal compass pointing some general direction.

Journeys are always different than daily routes.

Between the first step and the last step, a lot is happening on a journey. Depending on the distance and direction, we may encounter much change all around us. The landscape - changing, the people - changing, dialect and language changing and depending on that distance and the direction, we are changing too. Yes, we are changing on the inside as the outside shifts all around us. In the course of a journey, we are being changed and it often happens, to quote the Apostle Paul, “in the twinkling of an eye.”

I don't know about you, but some of the most important and transformational moments of my life have happened on different journeys. Truthfully, if I get going on one or all of these moments, I could take you on a purposeful digression or a meandering path that might draw you in or cause your head to explode (one or the other of course...maybe both). But that would be an unkind and unnecessary way to begin 2019.

For the proof of this, I cite Sam Bloom. When we journeyed to see the Blooms in California in the late 1960's and my dad pulled out several trays of slides and a projector, I thought Mr. Bloom was going to die from laughter. “*Herman,*” he said to my dad, “*I know these pictures all are interesting to you, but they are not interesting to the Blooms.*” Lesson learned from a

journey of yesteryear. Once again, we are all saved by Mr. Bloom's wisdom!

But, for a moment I want you to consider the slideshow created by the journey of the magi from the East who entered our screen in the Gospel of Matthew 2:1-12. These "Eastern Intellectuals" as Walter Brueggemann calls them (Ivy League no doubt), had the resources and interest to travel across mountains and deserts to meet a newborn in a manger. They followed the star and their instincts and ended up 9 miles off course (it would be like looking for Jesus at the State Capital when he was actually was in a garage in Grove City – which is the actual distance and difference in direction from Jerusalem to Bethlehem).

In search of Bethlehem, which was bathed only in starlight with no street lights, and looking for "The Light of the World," they found instead the bright lights of Jerusalem and brutal darkness of King Herod. Now, Herod was the worst kind of power-hungry host. He was so incredibly fearful and insecure that he wanted the baby king dead – and ended up killing all of the Line of David's firstborn sons under 2 years old to prove his point. Those who are fearful and insecure and in power are terrorists of the worst kind. Of course, that terror happened following the magi's safe return to the east.

This journey into the darkness and following the light shine of a star proved to be like none other for the magi and the Holy family. Two dreams drove this story east and south on to new journeys. The magi returned home “by another way” – because of one dream. Mary, Joseph and Jesus took off into the mountainous desert to the south of Palestine and escaped into Egypt where they stayed until King Herod was dead – which came from one of Joseph’s dreams.

**Today’s texts call us to journey into the unknown.** We are called across mountains and deserts knowing that Bethlehem is not the end of the journey but only the beginning. Why these Eastern intellectuals traveled to the west to meet a baby remains a mystery. Whenever men from the east came to Palestine in the past, it was for conquest and war. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians were not tourists. They came to destroy and rule. But, these wise men, these purposeful pagans were different. Although they were not Jews and were seeking no Messiah, yet they came to “worship him.”

Remember, the magi were basically following a star and prophet. The Prophet Isaiah foretold that the one who was coming was worthy beyond belief. When darkness was covering the earth, God was sending a beam of light to one place. One town. One barn. One family. One feed trough. That’s the way God works. God calls us to journey with this

light to the nations, this hope of the world, this newborn king. God doesn't give us lots of direction for our journey.

We are, like Abraham before us, told to get up and go. We are like Moses before us, called to travel west across a desert, through a "parted" sea and into the desert and await our next directional vision to a promised land. (This reminds me – it took ten plagues to get the people of God out of Egypt but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of the people of God). Journeys are like this. We often head out not really "knowing" but instead "trusting" – trusting God, people, and our instincts.

So how far are you willing to travel to experience the mystery and magic of a newborn king? How far are you willing to venture into the heart of darkness to seek the light of the world? And on your journey into the unknown, how open are you to "knowing," to "learning" and experiencing and encountering "star light" and mystery?

There is nothing rational about this approach to journeying.

As Albert Einstein once said, *"I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking."* Psychologist and author, M. Scott Peck put it another way, *"The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out*

*of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers."*  
Or in the words of Isaiah 60:1, *"Get up and move, 'shine' for your light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you."*

My friends, the light is dawning on the new year and this new season of Epiphany. Pack your bags. Let's head out on this journey together remembering this - without the journey, we will not experience Epiphany. In fact, without the journey we will experience NO epiphanies. Without the first step into the unknown, we never discover anything new. Amen.

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