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 January 6, 2019
 Epiphany Sunday

Follow the Star
Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men^[a] from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,^[b] and have come to pay him homage.” ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah^[c] was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*⁶ ‘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^[d] my people Israel.’”*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men^[e] and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising,^[f] until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped,^[g] they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Has anything ***grabbed your attention*** lately?
 Have you had any epiphanies? Or ‘a-ha’ moments?
 Do you think it could be ***God***—trying to draw you closer?
 Or taking you down a new path?

The kids in our church call these ‘***God-sightings***’.
 Sometimes we talk about seeing ‘God at work’ in your life.
 Some people call these things ‘coincidences’
 But as Christians, we don’t really believe in those,
 Because ***God*** is the one at work in our lives, ***not fate***....
 the question is, ***do we see God?***

Today is a day to really *stop and look for God*.

Today is a day to take *time and think* about how God is breaking into our lives, grabbing our attention.

What are our *God-sightings*?

Because today, January 6th, is *Epiphany* Sunday.

It's the 12th day, the final day, of Christmas.

The day when we celebrate the wise men from the East who went out of their way to find the baby Jesus.

The word **Epiphany** means a sudden appearance, experience or revelation from God—

Today's epiphany is about a brightest star,

a *sign from God*, that someone had been born, a Savior, King of the Jews.

It was a star that led the wise men on a journey that would change their lives forever.

These men, who paid attention to the skies, these astronomers who had studied, and watched, and waited,

finally saw an *awesome, brilliant star*—and knew *it was from God*.

These men were not even Jews, they were scientists, but they knew this was something spiritual, so they left everything to follow it.

They saw the star, and didn't label it as *coincidence*, or dumb luck,

They knew it was an *epiphany*.

So they left everything, and traveled a great distance, bringing their finest gifts to this newborn Savior.

I can only imagine the shock of their *families as they left*.

And the shock of *Herod* and the chief priests when they saw these exotic men from the East come riding into town looking for a NEW King of the Jews!

When you think about it,

What they did took incredible *courage*.

They took a leap of faith that this great star would lead them to something, To someone amazing, and indeed it did.

The Bible tells us that when they finally reached Jesus,
The place where the star stopped,
they were overwhelmed *with joy*.

The brilliant star led them right to the Savior,
so they opened their treasure chests and gave Jesus *their finest gifts*—
gifts befitting a King--gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These wise men were able to find Jesus because they were *paying attention*.
They were looking for *signs*.
They studied the skies every night,
and they knew when to *stop and follow* that one special star.

I wonder, are *we paying attention* to the skies in our lives?

You know, when we are looking for stars, the *sky is dark*.
We need to pay *attention* to our lives, when *things are dark*.
That makes sense, right?
When things are *hard*, when things look dark all around us,
that's when we *really need a sign* from God, isn't it?
That's when we usually ask God for help, isn't it?

We need a little *ray of hope, a tiny sliver of light*---
When things are dark.

I asked Ed one time, what epiphanies he's had in his life,
and one of the biggest was when his Dad said,
"Son, I think you need to go back to church".
He knew there was a Presbyterian church in Owasso, so he Googled us.
But you know WHEN his Dad said this to him?
During his divorce.
When things were hard, and the sky was dark.

Is anything a little *dark in your life* right now?
are you looking for a sign from God?
Some kind of star?
A little ray of light in a dark sky?

I find that God can *use just about anything* to be that ray of light,
that star in a dark sky...

God can use a song, a book, a conversation.
Even an illness, a tragedy, or an unexpected opportunity.

I find that in these past 15 months of feeling bad,
and especially the past three of desperately looking for relief from pain and
exhaustion,
God uses *all kinds of things to speak to me*.

Friday night I had a *dream*,
And I believe God can and does use our dreams.
I dreamt of being in a cave, not a tourist one,
But a dark one without any lights.
I was alone in the cold, turned around, unsure of which way to go,
until finally I turned and saw this little beam of light.
I started walking towards it, and it got bigger and brighter,
And I realized this is the way out!
It's far away, but this is the way out.

When I woke up I knew that God was telling me to *hold on*,
to look for the ray of light in my situation,
And *keep walking towards that light*, no matter how far away it might seem.

How is God trying to get your *attention*?
How is God *shining a light* into your situation?

Truth is, we never know what ray of light, what star God might use
to move us in a *new direction*,
and bring us closer to our God-given joy!

When we follow the 'stars' that pop up in our lives,
Something *important* happens.
We are led closer and closer to Jesus,
And then we have the opportunity to *bring our best* to Jesus.
We *want to bring* our best—out of gratitude to God!

The wise men brought *gifts* of gold, frankincense and myrrh—
Expensive treasures of their day.
What will we bring, out of gratitude for the greatest gift of all?
Will we bring our best *time, talent, and resources*?
We all have *something* we can bring to Jesus.

When we pay attention to the God-sightings,
 When we follow the stars that God sends our way,
 the result is ***Joy***.

The wise men were ***overwhelmed with joy*** –because that star led them to ***Jesus***.
 And that ***joy*** led them to ***give*** their finest gifts to their Savior.

The ***same thing can*** happen to us.
 We can follow the light God puts in our lives—and ***find joy***.
 We can ***find Jesus***.
 We can find ***opportunities to give*** of ourselves out of ***gratitude*** to God.

That’s the ***Good News of Epiphany***.
 And today I want us to ***take that Good News home*** with us,
 And think about it all year!

We are so good at ***doing, and keeping busy*** at Christmas.
 Today I want you to ***be still and receive***.

Today on this ***Epiphany*** Sunday, I want to ***give each one of you a gift***.
 A ***word***, written on a ***star***, in honor of the ***Star of Bethlehem***.
 These are all faith-words, words of inspiration,
 each one of them applicable to every one of us.

This is a word that I encourage you to ***reflect*** on, ***all year long***.
 Each yellow star has a word written on it,
 A word ***just for you***.

As they are passed in the offering plates,
 Please ***prayerfully*** reach in and grab one without looking,
believing this word is especially for you in 2019.

Then take the star ***home***, and place it somewhere ***prominent***.
 Somewhere you’ll see it everyday.
 Take time to ***think about*** it.
 Look it up in the ***dictionary***.
 Look up where it is found in the ***Bible***.

Allow it to *spea*k to you, and remind you of God's *presence and grace*.
Believe that it is a *timely* word for you, for this year, even if at times you *resist* it.

Know that it is a *gift* from God, a gift that will *keep on giving*.
A gift that you can *hold onto*, in times of trouble.

Know that this word is an *epiphany*,
a sudden revelation of the presence of God,
a *light* shining in the darkness of your life, a *star of hope*.

Let it also be a star that inspires you *to give*.
The wise men were so overwhelmed with joy when the star led them to Jesus,
that they opened their treasure chests and offered their finest to the Savior.
This word can lead you to such *joy*,
And *gratitude*,
that you too want to *share the gifts of God* with all those near you.

Before we receive the star-words, *let us pray for God* to use them in our lives

Loving God, we acknowledge that we are not always ready to receive your best gifts for us. You have given us an epiphany word in order that our searching will bring us to you.

It is often our habit to turn aside, stumble over, or even reject experiences and encounters that we later understand to have been precious gifts from You.

Help us to be open to the gift that you offer us now through our star words. We acknowledge that we do not fully understand what this word might mean for our faith, but we receive it from you with gratitude and pray that your Spirit will enable us to live into our word with intention and faithfulness. May we look back on this day a year from now, having learned from this word and this gift.

This we pray in the name of Your Son, our Savior Jesus, the one who was found by the star of Bethlehem, Amen.