*The Star Knows the Way*
**星星認路**

**Matthew 2:1-12** 1/5/2025 Grace Rohrer

***2****In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23171a)*] 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 in the east[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23172b)*] 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*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23174c)*] 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*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23176d)*] my people Israel.’ ”*

***7****Then Herod secretly called for the magi[*[*e*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23177e)*] 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 in the east,[*[*f*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23179f)*] until it stopped over the place where the child was.****10****When they saw that the star had stopped,[*[*g*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23180g)*] 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.*

Today is the first Sunday service of 2025. Happy New Year.

**Prayer:**
Lord God, you are the light of the world, the source of all light. We pray that You shine Your light upon us, filling us with the wisdom of Your Spirit, opening our hearts to understand the truth. May the words of our mouths and the thoughts within our hearts be pleasing to You. We ask this in the name of our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Where will ATPC go in 2025? It’s been nearly five years since the pandemic passed. In that time, we’ve had two presidential elections, with Trump leaving office and then returning. I can’t help but wonder where we will go in the new year.

Do you know where your life and future are heading? How do you feel about it? More often than not, we don’t know.

In today’s gospel, the wise men, when they set out on their journey, did not know where they were going. We often overlook this fact. What if you or I were also in this same situation? What if we don’t know the destination when we embark on our journey?

Epiphany can be translated as a sudden realization or revelation. The Feast of Epiphany is closely related to “light”—the light of a lonely star, the light of revelation, and the light in the manger. Light is necessary for people to see. Light comes in different strengths and forms.

I will illustrate the concept of light with two images.

**1. Lightning in the Cornfields of Iowa.**

Reformation theologian John Calvin likened a thunderstorm to God’s revelation. He described how we live our lives alone, much like walking in darkness during the night. Our eyes adjust to the darkness, and we learn to discern large shapes and shadows. We stumble and fumble our way through, figuring out our own paths. Yet, we can never truly see things with clarity or in full light. But, there are those moments...those lightning strike moments...when God illuminates the earth and for a fleeting instant we can see things as God intends...for a few moments we’ve been given a gift of light. And it changes what we know about the world. Calvin says that’s revelation. That is epiphany.

Do you long for God to speak to you in a lightning experience? To see a huge, loud, and clear revelation, where your world is illuminated, and the next step becomes obvious?

**2. The Starry Pilgrimage Road.**

Two years ago, I walked the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, starting from Portugal and arriving at the Cathedral of Santiago in Spain three weeks later. Along the way, I met many people—most only once, though some I met several times along the way. The people walking had different stories, different reasons for making the journey. Some were repenting for sins, praying for others, reflecting on decisions, giving thanks after a serious illness, or challenging themselves physically. There were many ancient churches both large and small on the path. The walk was difficult, cold, and dark—mountains to climb, streams to ford, rivers to cross. When I arrived at the cathedral, I was surprised to find thousands of people in the square. I gradually realized that the pilgrimage was not just a personal journey; it wasn’t about knowing people or even differences. It was a shared experience. People from all over the world, speaking different languages, all standing in the same square, eagerly waiting to enter the church and experience God’s presence. In one way or another, we were all seeking revelation, actively or passively.

This moment of revelation was not like being struck by lightning but a gradual, peaceful process. The environment around me slowly became clearer.

We understand God in many different ways—sometimes through a sudden and bright flash of lightning, other times through the steady, gentle light of the stars or the sun.

I would say the story of the Epiphany is not about lightning moments, but rather about gradual revelation. The gradual unfolding of understanding happens along the journey, not in a single moment or flash

This story begins with learning the road we should take, ends with learning the road we shouldn't take, and in between, it is about learning who will accompany us on the journey. Gradually, we learn where to look.

Matthew 2 depicts the wise men, famous for their ability to read the stars. They followed the star to Jerusalem. When the wise men arrived, they inquired about the newborn king of the Jews, but they could not find the one who was born King of the Jews. In Micah 5:2, it says, "But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel." These unexpected foreign travelers followed the words of the prophet Micah and walked nine miles to Bethlehem to find the child.

This news is quite shocking. Bethlehem? That small, humble, insignificant, even uninteresting Bethlehem? Jerusalem is the city of kings, home of wealth, hope and the Temple. Bethlehem is not at all what people were expecting. The story tells us... you don’t always have to look for God in the palaces of elites and rulers... instead, look for God in a dirty, poor, humble stable, with a scandal-ridden family and a vulnerable child. Listen to the prophets of our faith and seek God in those places and people that the world has made invisible, useless, and simple. God doesn’t always, and in fact, rarely shows up where we expect.

Herod encouraged them, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, inform me so that I can go and worship him as well." It's ironic that these words came from King Herod.

This is the first thing revealed in the story. If you are moving forward seeking God, remember that the wise men diligently searched. Take this journey seriously. Be aware that it may take time, and you may encounter danger along the way.

Now, I want to turn to the second question—who is participating in this journey? The wise men found Jesus, and the Bible says they were overjoyed. This moment of gradual awakening revealed who had come to the manger, realizing that the one they had been seeking was not at all what they had expected. This King of the Jews was actually the King of all, the Holy One, Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... These foreign men didn’t just come to honor the newborn king; they came to the cradle of the new king, invited to join the Holy Jewish family of Mary and Joseph.

God’s mercy expanded even further... the whole world was invited to share in God’s life.

So, the second part of the gradual revelation is that the people who will accompany you on your journey of faith may not be the ones you expect. God may give you unexpected companions on the way... Who are those people who surprise you by stepping into your journey? Whose wisdom do you cherish? Who are the people who may have a faith different from yours, but who, in a way you can hardly believe, have shown you God’s love, generosity, and compassion?

Gradually, move away from the places you shouldn’t go.

So far, as we’ve seen in the story in Matthew 2, the wise men gradually discovered where they should go and who they should meet. Now, let’s look at the third dimension of the story. At the end of this narrative, the story turns to the places they shouldn’t go. When the wise men met Jesus, their encounter changed everything. They didn’t return to Herod; instead, the scripture tells us they took a different route home. After spending time with the Holy Family, they saw God’s true nature and saw through Herod’s deceit. Their worldview was radically transformed. The familiar road was abandoned... and their connection with power and prestige was rejected... The wise men essentially repented for their relationship with King Herod and aligned themselves with the Holy Child.

The wise men were deeply focused on this newborn child. They had traveled a long way to see Him, and they intended to spend some time gazing at this child who would turn the world upside down. This was an act of patience and hope—looking at Jesus, believing He could change everything. In fact, it would make you want to look away, because focusing on God and aligning your life with His will would leave you disoriented, repositioned, and set on a completely different journey. The wise men indeed looked. They did not turn away. And it changed everything. They packed up and said goodbye to the regime and the country they knew, taking another route home.

This is the third point. What this illustrates is that sometimes the road we know is not always the road we should take. Sometimes, the familiar path is not the way to life and fulfillment. Sometimes, encountering God means we are invited to take a different road... we may have to change our course... When we see the light, we will see choices and possibilities we may have never imagined before. We are free to venture down the road less traveled, even if it is rugged and unknown, because that road has been illuminated before us.

When I think about my experience on the Camino pilgrimage, I am reminded of the lightning. Because, honestly, in our faith, there are indeed moments like the one Moses had on Mount Sinai, when lightning and thunder accompanied the giving of the Ten Commandments. God does speak to us through lightning and dramatic gestures. But in the wise men’s journey, we learn that sometimes revelation is gentle and steady, like the light that gradually appears at sunrise.

When you reflect on this story, when the wise men gradually came to understand the true nature of the journey they had embarked on, what insights do you gain? I’d like to leave you with a few questions:

1. Where are you seeking God?
2. Who is searching with you?
3. Is it time to seek a road that is unfamiliar?

The wise men couldn't see the child or Bethlehem, but they knew the star could. Maybe we can’t see the destination, but they knew which star to follow. That was enough. That was all they needed to know—the star knows the way.

I cannot tell you where my life, my family, this church, or our country will go, but may the Lord help us. May we walk the path we are meant to walk. May we move forward with love, intimacy, and sincerity. May we walk the road of justice, truth, and honesty. May we live this out through compassion, inclusion, hospitality, and caring for others. May we walk the path of integrity and authenticity. May we live with gratitude and forgiveness.