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 Norwalk Christian Church
 January 3, 2016 (Epiphany)
 Matthew 2:1-12

Generosity

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men 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, 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 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 my people Israel.’”*

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men 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, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, 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.

A prophecy of Simeon has been fulfilled! Rejoice in fulfillment and rejoice in the one who will save Israel!

Only, not everyone was rejoicing. Wise men have arrived in Jerusalem, looking for the new king of the Jews. King Herod did NOT like this. Feeling threatened by the idea or notion of a new king, Herod, being Herod, told the magi to report back to him after finding this babe and he too would pay his respects.Conniving, isn't he?

So we have these kings, wisemen, soothsayers, astrologers, predictors of the future, magi, magicians, wizards...however you'd like to interpret them, we have these people

who look to the earth, the sky, the sea, everything around them to tell them the truth; about life, what is to come, everything they could figure out, they seek to find it. We have these kings, these magi astronomers, who have traveled what is probably a fair distance already. They knew when they started their travels, since they were able to tell Herod when they first saw the star, so that lets us know some time has lapsed.

How long they have traveled, we do not know. Weeks, months, however long, it was an extended time. Matthew doesn't tell of the magi ever interacting with or joining the shepherds in nearby fields. Perhaps it's been several months, a different season of the year, their paths not crossing. And were there three magi or were there more? Did they bring servants with them or were they by themselves? We don't know.

They saw a star that called to them, telling them the King of the Jews had been born. But they have no idea who it is, who lays there, but they are called to seek it. I don't know if you've ever felt called to do something. If you've tried to run away from something, yet find yourself always getting nearer. A ministry, a job, a task, that you find yourself face to face with. Or perhaps you've experienced the other side where you've searched high and low, near and far, and can't seem to find what you are looking for, what you are seeking. You might not even know what it is, much less where you can find it. You've sought the ministry, the job, the extra tasks, you've bought into the "needing more" mentality and like Bono, you still haven't found what you're looking for.

These magi didn't know what they were looking for. They didn't know why they were called by a star, a bright light in the sky. Perhaps you haven't figured out why you were called to the light yet either. You may find yourself traveling with the wise men to meet Christ. Or perhaps you've already been introduced to the light. Each of us has a different story to tell. Each of us has experienced our own bright lights that lead us to new life, where we met Christ. We are all called to Christ. What we find lying in the manger might be different for each of us, but we are all called. That's the point the magi are making. For even the Gentiles are called! This is a gift for all, for everyone. This is the reason we celebrate, we give gifts, we feast, for on Epiphany is when we realize that this isn't a gift for some, it's for all of us.

Epiphany doesn't get its due praise and celebration from most of us. Originally, when the season of Advent came to a close, the season of Christmastide began. Christmas was the twelve days between Advent and Epiphany. Just as Advent leads us to Christmas, Christmas leads us to Epiphany. In places like Ethiopia, their Epiphany is so much bigger than their Christmas. They tie in Christ's baptism and literally roll out a red carpet along the streets for the priests to walk down as they complete their annual rituals with wrapped up crosses carried as Moses carried the commandments and colorful tasseled umbrellas providing shade for praying clergy. In places like Spain and France, on Epiphany Eve the children leave their shoes outside their houses filled with hay. The hay is for the camels the wise men rode on to eat. And in the morning they awake to their shoes filled with gifts of thanks from the wise men as they continue their travels. They celebrate with giving gifts just as the wise men gave gifts. That's why we

give at Christmastime too. It's why we celebrate God's gift to all of the world. Epiphany is a time to celebrate, it's a time to rejoice, to feast, to turn on all the lights, for it's the time we, as people, human beings, realized new life was born through Jesus Christ for all people, Jews and Gentiles. God's generosity to us overflows and exceeds our imaginations. And we want to give back. The wise men give out of genuine heart and soul and love. The magi give generously, just as God gave generously.

Yes, life being brought into the world gives us hope, gives us joy, anticipation. But NEW life. A new kind of lifethat births all those things and more. It excites, it dreams, without limits or boundaries, new life emerges and breaks through to people of all walks of life, of all countries, of all beliefs. <pause> These magi weren't Christians, they were Gentiles, foreigners with different beliefs. Yet they were so compelled by the light to seek it out. They sought out Christ. They saw the truth, what they were searching for, and they humbly paid homage.

These magi that told the future, these were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Christ as Savior. They were the first to accept that this child was birthing a new life that was available for all.

Now Matthew, when writing this book, liked to play favorites and didn't tend to like Gentiles very much. So for him to place this story within his writing. Yes, it fulfills a prophecy, but it also sets the stage for what is to come, for what is ahead, to expect the unexpected.

What the wise men were searching for and what they found, I'm not sure. But the experience of the journey, the experience of being on holy ground, in the presence of humble love. To experience a new life. A new life for all people. Something that transcends everything else they knew. That is Epiphany.

May we each seek the light and be the light as we move toward wholeness in our fragmented world.