



BREAKFAST EPIPHANIES 2019

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Thanks for joining us for Breakfast Epiphanies!

Enjoy all the supplemental info at once or come back each morning with your cup of coffee to experience more Breakfast Epiphanies.

WED., DEC. 26

Epiphany Liturgy

Written by the Rev. Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13, Director of the Worship Program

[Download the Epiphany Liturgy](#)

THURS., DEC. 27

“Ringin’ Out” and “Ringin’ In”: Leave-Taking of Nativity and Sunday before Theophany

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

[Read the Blog](#)

FRI., DEC. 28

Scripture Activity

How well do you know the passages of Scripture that reference Epiphany? Use this quiz with groups of all ages! No worries, the answers and additional reference info are provided.

[Download the Scripture Activity](#)

[Download the Scripture Activity with Answers](#)

SAT., DEC. 29

The Magi

Written by the Rev. Dr. Steven S. Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, from his blog, “[The Bible Guy](#)”



For millions of Western Christians, Jan. 6 is the Feast of the Epiphany, a day associated particularly with the light of the star that guided the Magi to the Christ Child (see Matthew 2:1-12). Tradition says that there were *three* Magi, that they were kings from three continents and three races, and that they were named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. Of course, that is the way it is in our Christmas pageants and in our crèches. But none of this tradition appears in Matthew’s simple account:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him” (Matt. 2:1-2).

The Magi were a clan of priests and astrologers from Persia—our words “magic” and “magician” derive from “magi.” Matthew does not tell us how many Magi came—the traditional number three comes from their three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11-12). The idea that they were kings from distant lands and races comes from Isaiah 60:1-6, traditionally read as fulfilled in the visit of the Magi:

*Nations will come to your light
and kings to your dawning radiance.*

*. . . the nations’ wealth will come to you.
Countless camels will cover your land,
young camels from Midian and Ephah.
They will all come from Sheba,
carrying gold and incense,
proclaiming the Lord’s praises.*

Still, there is an appropriateness to the tradition’s reading of the Magi as representing the whole outside world. After all, they come to the manger as the ultimate outsiders. They come not only from outside Judea, but also from outside the Roman Empire itself—from the land of the feared Parthians, an armed and unstable threat on the empire’s eastern frontier. They are not Jews, either ethnically or religiously; while Matthew says nothing of their religious heritage, they would have been Zoroastrians. Remarkably, it is Matthew who tells their story: Matthew, the most *Jewish* of the Gospel writers, is the one who records a visit to the Christ child from foreigners and unbelievers! Yet in this gospel these foreigners come, not as enemies to threaten the Child, but as pilgrims to honor him.



Herod's religious experts also see the Magi's star, and they rightly interpret the Scriptures that witness to the coming king:

*As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
though you are the least significant of Judah's forces,
one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from
you.*

His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.

Therefore, he will give them up

until the time when she who is in labor gives birth.

The rest of his kin will return to the people of Israel.

*He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.*

They will dwell secure,

*because he will surely become great throughout the earth;
he will become one of peace.*

(Micah 5:2-5; see Matt. 2:4-6)

But these faithful, patriotic citizens stay in the false security of Herod's walled palace and never see the miracle. Instead, it is the foreign, Gentile Magi who become the first, faithful witnesses to the new thing God is doing—breaking into our world as one of us there in Bethlehem.

Epiphany celebrates the light of God shining into the *entire* world with the birth of Christ, and indeed, the light of God's revelation shining into *all* our lives yesterday, today—and one day, forever! May we learn from the wise men to be “wise guys” ourselves: to be ready to receive God's blessing from the hands, and to hear God's word in the voice, of a stranger.

SUN., DEC. 30

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Study

Written by the Rev. Derek Davenport '05/'17, Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute and Digital Marketing Analyst

Charles Wesley wrote the lyrics, Felix Mendelssohn composed the music, and teenaged organist William Hayman Cummings put it all together. Learn more about this classic hymn. This in-depth study is great for use in a small group, in corporate worship, and for personal devotions.

Download the Study

Download Piano Accompaniment Performed by the Rev. Dr. Ron Cole-Turner, H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics

Access Guitar Accompaniment Guitar sheet music for performers of various levels provided by the Miller Summer Youth Institute

MON., DEC. 31

A Poetic Sermon based on Psalm 89:1-4 and Luke 1:26-38

Written by the Rev. Joshua Fisher '14/'18, Pastor, Homestead United Presbyterian Church and Lincoln Place Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Download A Poetic Sermon

TUES., JAN. 1

The Journey of the Magi—Our Faith Journey Meditations on Matthew 2:1-12

Written by Dr. Martha Robbins, Joan Marshall Associate Professor Emerita of Pastoral Care

Part I

Matthew 2:1-12

2:1 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.

So often we think of having a Christian faith as having a set of beliefs or truths given to us by Scripture which guide our lives as Christians. We forget that faith is also a journey encompassing moments of rupture, transition, insight or revelation, and repatterning. The inbreaking of God in our lives through events and persons, as well as in worship, sometimes dislodges us from our familiar ways of seeing things and our habitual ways of responding to others and to God. Such events may be occasioned by a joyful or painful disruption of the ways our lives have been organized, such as a birth of a child, or a separation from loved ones through divorce, death, or geographic relocation (events which disrupt our daily routines, our economic responsibilities, our way of organizing our futures).

There is yet another way in which our lives may be disrupted: We may one day glimpse a star on the horizon and have a moment of truth when the deep inner stirrings of our beings are moved by a glimmer of the "more" of what we can be. The promise of God forever calls us to "more being." Often these insights, intuitions, rumblings, awakened in us by the Holy Spirit, mediated through certain events (personal, social or historical), come when we least expect them. They may even come when it feels downright inconvenient to us.

T.S. Eliot has captured something of this in his poem *The Journey of the Magi*:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

(from T.S. Eliot, Collected Poems, 1909-1962 [Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991]. This poem is shared at the URL <https://www.buildfaith.org/the-journey-of-the-magi/#gref> under fair use guidelines provided by The Poetry Foundation.)

WED., JAN. 2

The Journey of the Magi—Our Faith Journey Meditations on Matthew 2:1-12

Written by Dr. Martha Robbins, Joan Marshall Associate Professor Emerita of Pastoral Care

Part II

Having seen the star (having left the intuitive glimmer of a promise of more to be known and loved) the Magi set out on their journey to see where it would lead. Such leavings require faith in the form of courage. “A cold coming we had of it,/ Just the worst time of the year/ For a journey, and such a long journey:/ The ways deep and the weather sharp./ The very dead of winter.” In the Magi’s setting out on their journey, we hear echoes of God’s call of Abraham to “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1) and God’s promise to Moses “I have come down to deliver [my people] from the Egyptians, and to bring them . . . [to] a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8). Indeed, when a glimmer of light (a star, a call, a promise) awakens or reawakens in our hearts and beckons us to follow, we set out on a journey and enter into a time of transition that is at once uniquely personal and intimately connected to other members of the human family.

In times of rather instant travel, the notion of “journey” may lose its symbolic significance. Yet each of us knows that whenever we have experienced times of transition in our lives, whether they be individual transitions or transitions in the life of our communities, no instant arrival at a new way of knowing, valuing, and believing is possible. Internal and external conflicts signal that the old ways of understanding and making sense of our lives no longer hold us together. We have indeed set out, but we have not yet arrived at a new place. Being “in between” is not experienced as comfortably as riding in an airplane, car, or bus, where we may bring along the comforts of home. Rather, some writers in the Old and New Testaments have more accurately imaged this transitional space as wilderness or desert.

Abraham, Moses, and the Magi “leave” the familiar and journey onward in the light of the promise. When they enter into the wilderness/desert, where the dim light of promise recedes in their memories, they become despondent. Indeed, there were times of deep regret for having left what they had known. Even if it was not the best of times, it was at least familiar to them. And the Magi could discuss together the “times we regretted/ the summer places on slopes, the terraces,/ . . . With the voices singing in our ears, saying/ That this was all folly” (Eliot). Or, perhaps, regret becomes more a deep-seated anger and protest: Why did you lead us out to die in the wilderness? Better to work for the Egyptians and remain oppressed than “die in the wilderness” (Exod 14:11)!

The wilderness phase of the journey disorients and tests the heart. It stretches every fiber of our being in order that we may be capacitated to receive more of what the Promise holds for us. We may grumble, kick, or scream and want to turn back, while blaming others for our precariously vulnerable condition. The star disappears, leaving us in the darkness with a sense of meaninglessness, a felt experience of the void. This darkness is the time of unknowing, undoing, dispossession in order to become possessed with a new kind of knowing that will affect our very way of being together as a people. Indeed, this is the

time when we are invited to let go of all our images and preconceptions of who we are and how things should be. By the power of the Promise alone we continue the journey, encouraged by other significant fellow travelers who hold out the memory of the Promise to us in times of darkness.

THURS., JAN. 3

The Journey of the Magi—Our Faith Journey Meditations on Matthew 2:1-12

Written by Dr. Martha Robbins, Joan Marshall Associate Professor Emerita of Pastoral Care

Part III

Emptied, the Magi came to the place where the star reappeared brighter than before. Not a moment too soon, the Magi entered the stable, where “they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage” (Matt. 2:11). The desert journey prepared them for this moment of seeing, of encountering the Holy Mystery of God in the very midst of human experience. Indeed, the Magi could not grasp the Mystery by standing outside it, by simply observing the fact; they could do so only by allowing themselves to be grasped by the Holy Mystery revealed in this moment. “Falling on their knees” they were “still and still moving/ Into another intensity/ For a further union, a deeper communion . . . Requiring a condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing no less than everything)” (Eliot, Four Quartets). And they understood. The meaning of the whole journey burst forth in a moment of revelation: Emmanuel, God in Christ among us, our “hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

A new, more complex, and richer understanding of how God has been and is with us in all our moments in the journey of faith allows us to piece together the disparate elements of the journey and to know each moment as an essential part of the journey itself. Then, “opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts” in response to the gift given to them. They indeed are empowered to be response-able for what they have received.

Hence the journey does not end here. The Magi “left for their own country by another road” (Matt. 2:12). Indeed, having encountered the Holy Mystery pervading all life, they must return home by a different way, for they are different. Everything of necessity will be different as they and we repattern our lives according to what we have been given to see, to know, to understand.

The repatterning of our lives is not easy. There may be times when we wonder with Eliot’s Magi: “were we led all that way for/ Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly/ We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,/ But had thought they were different; this Birth was/ Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death./ We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,/ But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,/ With an alien people clutching their gods./ I should be glad of another death.”

The inbreaking of God in and through Christ in our lives is consequently both a birth and a death. We are graciously born and borne into a new way of seeing, valuing, and believing as persons in relationship to others and the world within the context of human history. As such, there is a death, the loss of our former ways of being as individuals and as communities of faith. Each new breakthrough, insight, revelation in the journey of faith requires a repatterning of our lives according to what has been given to us to see and know.

Not only is this true for our personal lives, but it is also true in terms of human history. Ever since the “Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14), we Christians have become responsible to actualize our freedom in and through the world, time, and history. Today, we are in an unprecedented historical period wherein the vision of who we are and what we can become as a human community is being threatened. As Christians, our journey in faith leads us to take seriously our responsibility of preserving the planet Earth, the world God so loved. Indeed, in the face of such a challenge, fear of disrupting our smaller worlds may prevent us from setting out. But have we, as a people of faith, been led all this way for birth, or for death?

FRI., JAN. 4

Epiphany Quiz

Have a bit of fun with your church group by asking these Epiphany quiz questions! What does the word "epiphany" mean anyway?

[Download the Quiz](#)

[Download the Quiz with Answers](#)

SAT., JAN. 5

"What is Epiphany?" Video

Consider using the video "What is Epiphany?" with a small Bible study, a youth or adult Sunday School class, or during your Sunday service.

SUN., JAN. 6

“Ambassadors for Christ”

A Baptism of the Lord Sunday Sermon

Written by the Rev. Dr. Christine Chakoian, Vice President for Seminary Advancement

[Download "Ambassadors for Christ" Sermon](#)

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
Phone: 412-362-5610



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