

Stars

Isaiah 60:1-4a, Matthew 2:1-12

Center Church, Hartford

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Three things struck me this year as I read the familiar story of the three astrologers/magi/wise men (they were not kings, sorry, that's a confusion with the Isaiah passage) who followed a star to Bethlehem. Three things to remember in my life, and that I pass on to you this year as we enter 2020.

First, they took time to notice something new. They paid attention to the world around them. Undoubtedly, they thought deeply about what they were seeing, talked to other trusted people about what they discerned, and only then, acted on their conclusions. They didn't ignore the star or assume it was for someone else. They noticed.

Take time to notice when something new comes into your world. Pay attention.

Second, they were open to wonder and mystery. In their time, this was easier, as the world around them had not been so thoroughly dissected and categorized and **explained**. They knew that there was so much they did not know or understand. It's amazing, really amazing, to think these guys went on a considerable journey chasing that star (look at a map sometime to see the distance from Iran or India to Bethlehem). They had no idea what they were looking for, other than a notion that the star meant the birth of a new king. It was a mystery to be discovered, a wonder they hoped to behold. What a gift and joy to open oneself that way!

Be open to wonder and mystery. Not everything has to be meticulously planned and exhaustively explained. Be open to wonder and mystery.

Third, they entered into a story that was not theirs. They attended to what, on the surface anyway, didn't seem to have anything to do with them! What was it to wise men from "the East" that the little country of Israel, now controlled by the Roman Empire, had a new king? Kings come and go in little countries; they always have. These guys weren't Jewish, so the prophecy about a new king among a very small religious group

wouldn't seem to have anything to do with them. And yet, being open to wonder and mystery and paying attention, they decided that maybe it did have something to do with them after all, and so they chased the star.

It is very easy in our complex world to decide that things happening in far away places, or even just in other towns or neighborhoods, don't have anything to do with us. It is very tempting to cocoon with our family and friends as our only priority and not get involved in what doesn't seem to have anything to do with us, especially if there is any danger, or perception of danger, involved. Like Anti-Semitism. Like Racism if it's not directed at our race. Like what is happening, again, in the Middle East.

This year, attend to what doesn't seem to have anything to do with you, because you might find out that in God's eyes, it does.

Follow the star. No, chase after it. Pay attention, notice. Open yourself to wonder and mystery. Attend to things that don't seem to have anything to do with you.

For a few moments now, I invite you to meditate on the star you were given (if you came in late and did not receive one, no shame here, just raise your hand and one will be brought to you). Put yourself in the mind and spirit of a wise one and, paying attention, consider what message this star has for you. Remember that though the message is for you, it may also draw you to something beyond you, as the star drew the Magi. It is about you, and about much more than you. Let's be silent together.

I wish you blessings this year as you live into whatever call God has for you. I want to close with a poem written by Frank Horne, a poet of the Harlem Renaissance (and for those who know who Lena Horne was, he was her uncle). He wrote this in 1942, as World War II raged across two oceans. It's called "Kid Stuff."

The wise guys
tell me
that Christmas
is Kid Stuff . . .
Maybe they've got
something there——
Two thousand years ago

three wise guys
chased a star
across a continent
to bring
frankincense and myrrh
to a Kid
born in a manger
with an idea in his head . . .
And as the bombs
crash
all over the world
today
the real wise guys
know
that we've all
got to go chasing stars
again
in the hope
that we can get back
some of that
Kid Stuff
born two thousand years ago—