

Shine Through the Darkness
Matthew 2:1-12
Jan 8, 2023
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Some people suggest that before you go see a Shakespeare play, you should read a children's version of the play to find out what the play is really about. Things get boiled down to their most important elements for children sometimes- while many adults only pretend to understand.

I wanted to better understand what a star really is- so following the above logic, I went to a website for children in grades 3, 4, and 5 called Generation Genius. I searched for "What is a star?" I found some helpful information. "A *star* is an exploding ball of burning gas held together by gravity." The closest star to earth is the sun. The closer a star is to the earth the brighter it shines.

A star seems very much alive- an exploding ball of burning gas. Not static- not safe if too close but a good messenger or sign if far enough away not to burn us, but close enough to shine brightly in the sky.

The Magi, the mysterious astronomers/astrologers from the East who came following a star was mentioned only in Matthew, the gospel thought to have been for a Jewish audience. The Magi following a star all the way to the Christ child opens up the whole good news to the Gentiles.

Malcolm Guite put it this way in his "A Sonnet for Epiphany":
It might have been just someone else's story.
Some chosen people get a special king.
We leave them to their own peculiar glory.

*We don't belong. It doesn't mean a thing,
But when these 3 arrive they bring us with them.
Gentiles like us, their wisdom might be ours;
A steady step that finds an inner rhythm.
A pilgrim's eye that sees beyond the stars.
They did not know his name but still they sought him.
They came from elsewhere but still they found;
In temples they found those who sold and bought him.
But in the filthy stable, hallowed ground.
Their courage gives our questing hearts a voice
To seek, to find, to worship, to rejoice.*

The Magi followed the “exploding ball of burning gas” in the sky until it stopped over the home of Mary and Joseph and the toddler Jesus. This took great courage and faith. A courage and a faith that we are invited into. We are welcome at the feet of Jesus. We are welcome to worship, and to bring our gifts. We are welcome to ponder the mystery.

Some scientists think that this star was a comet, but others believe that the Magi were astrologers. “Astrology was widely used at the [time](#), and with the Magi coming from Babylon, it's plausible that they were astrologers. And due to a particular alignment of planets and [stars](#), they may have read a hidden meaning among the stars, leading them to King Herod. For example, Jupiter's display could have been of great significance here, as astrology associated the planet [Jupiter](#) with royalty, so [the moon](#) passing it in the constellation of Aries on April 17, 6 B.C. could have heralded the birth of Christ.”

Yet another idea is “that there was indeed a bright object in the sky — a conjunction between planets and stars. A conjunction occurs when two or more celestial bodies appear to meet in the night sky from our

location on [Earth](#). These events can continue every night in a similar location for days or weeks. If the wise men were to follow the moment of conjunction, it's possible they would have been led in a specific direction.” (space.com)

Scientists and scholars have been pondering where such a bright light came from for over a thousand years. How was there such a bright star that moved in the sky? How did the light come?

This makes me think of a poem called “How the Light Comes” by Jan Richardson:

I cannot tell you how the light comes. What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining. That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us. That it loves searching out what is hidden, what is lost, what is forgotten or in peril or in pain...

I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does. That it will. That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you, though it may seem long ages in coming or arrive in a shape you did not foresee. And so may we this day turn ourselves toward it. May we lift our faces to let it find us. May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes. May we open and open more and open still to the blessed light that comes.

Somehow the star in the sky led the Magi to King Herod's place where they took a pitstop and asked for directions. King Herod was not thrilled that they came seeking the King of the Jews. Herod felt threatened and his insecurity got the best of him. King Herod's people were able to inform the Magi that Bethlehem was the predicted place of the Messiah's birth, and off they went to see Jesus.

They brought gifts for the King, and worshiped with joy. Then they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod to give him an update

about the King of the Jews' whereabouts. So they returned home another way. They were changed.

A 19th century Catholic professor Gerard Hopkins prayed:

Moonless darkness stands between.

Past, O Past, no more be seen!

But the Bethlehem star may lead me

To the sight of him who freed me

From the self that I have been.

Make me pure, Lord: thou art holy;

Make me meek, Lord: thou wert lowly;

Now beginning and alway:

Now begin on Christmas Day.

Here we are in 2023 we stand on the threshold of a new year, a year of hope and promise. A year of ministry. We pivot away from focusing on Christmas or do we?

I'd like to close our sermon time with the words of Howard Thurman:

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost.

To heal the broken.

To feed the hungry.

To release the prisoner.

To rebuild the nations.

To bring peace among others.

To make music in the heart.

Amen.