

Sermon Jan 5th Worship leader Liz Griswold

Let's see if I can get back to my notes.

Well, there you have it. Epiphany can do all kinds of fun things with epiphany, can't you? And I particularly liked that tradition of blessing a house. I feel like that's what happened when the magi came.

So a customer called the customer service line to complain about a power outage after a big storm and then stopped raging long enough to ask, how will I know when my lights are back on? The customer service agent remained silent for a second, debating the best way to answer such an obvious and even ridiculous question. How will you know when your lights are back on? It'll be brighter than it is now. And the customer promptly hung up on her.

Epiphany is about revelation. It's about light. It's about brightness. In literature, an epiphany is a moment when a character has a sudden realization that changes their understanding of themselves or the world. In the church, it's the day we celebrate the magi, seeing the star in the sky, announcing the birth of Jesus, celebrating the sudden realization of who Jesus really is.

Our first reading said that darkness covers the earth. But then it says, you, light has come. The glory of the Lord shines upon you. The world had been cold and dark and hard, and they needed this light. In Isaiah 60, that's a prophecy.

And as Pastor Rudy so wonderfully said, it speaks about things yet to come. But it speaks in what is termed a prophetic perfect tense. Now, I'm not an English scholar. I know my verbs and my nouns and my adjectives and maybe my prepositions most of the time and adverbs, but this perfect tenses stuff eludes me. But a prophetic perfect tense is in religious writing.

It speaks of something that will happen as if it already has. Arise, shine. Your light has come. The glory has risen. As Pastor Rudy said, it's that funny spot of in between.

It's speaking into what is and what will be all at the same time. Isaiah prophesied about the magi in verse six. It says, they shall bring gold and frankincense and proclaim the praise of the Lord. The magi were already part of God's story before they were even born. But we'll get to that in a few minutes.

Epiphany is about the revelation of who Jesus is, about the light and the darkness, and it seems to revolve around the Magi. So what can we learn from the Magi?

I'm guessing that we've heard, all of us have heard about the gifts that the Magi brought and what they mean. The gold, the frankincense, the myrrh. As I read these verses again and again, I was struck with maybe some different things that I was learning from the Magi. And indulge me as I share them with you. The Magi were astrologers.

They were stargazers. They looked to for meaning from the stars. They looked for direction. They looked for those things, and God met them right where they were at. He put a star in the sky so that they would understand.

He spoke to them in a way that they best understood. He drew them onto a new, perhaps unexpected journey. The Lord meets us where we're at. He speaks to us in ways that we understand through music, nature, others, words, unexpected happenings, miracles. And he speaks to us in a way that we understand so that he can draw us onto a journey unto Himself, that we would see him, that we would have the revelation of who he is.

He draws us to search for him, to join him in his plan, to journey with him and to be part of a bigger story. Isaiah prophesied about the Magi over 600 years before they were even born.

They were already part of a bigger story. And so are you and I. It's not just about today and next week.

We are part of God's plan in a much bigger story, and we all matter. Ephesians 2:10 says, we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for us to do. He already has things for us to do already, ways for us to be. He already prepared him. We're part of this bigger thing, which I find pretty exciting, actually.

The concept of God preparing these works in advance speaks to his sovereignty and his foreknowledge, the Greek word, and forgive me for butchering this. But Proetimo Imazo suggests a deliberate and purposeful planning by God. This indicates that God has a specific

plan and purpose for each believer's life. Historically, this reassures the believers of God's control and guidance, encouraging them to trust in his divine plan. So, Number one, He speaks to us where we're at.

He draws us into a journey to find Him. We're part of a bigger Plan, first thing, second thing, the Magi followed the star to Jerusalem. But then they got there and they weren't quite where they needed to be. They had to stop and ask where the king of the Jew was, the king of the Jews was, where was he born, where is he? Yes, men, they stopped and they asked for directions.

Herod heard about, I'm telling you, GPS has saved many a marriage, mine included. Just saying, Herod heard about this and it's interesting that these guys from afar saw the star and recognized what was happening. Herod, who was kind of in the area, had no clue, missed it completely. Do we miss sometimes when Jesus is right there or do we sense it from afar? Herod got afraid and he called for the chief priests and the scribes to tell him where was the Messiah to be born.

And they told him what the scripture said, what was prophesied. Herod also spoke with the Magi, asking them to come back after they found Jesus so he could go worship too. In point of fact, he had wanted to go back so he could kill. Jesus was not planning on worshipping. He was afraid of being his kingship being usurped.

And he planned on killing Jesus. And we know this because later on he orders that all male children under the age of two would be killed. He wanted to, whoever it was, he wanted to make sure they were gone.

So the Magi come. The star led them most of the way, but they needed the Word of God to bring more clarity to what was going on. God speaks to us and he leads us. But we need the Word of God to understand who he is and what he wants from us. The Bible is alive.

It's sharper than any two edged sword. He speaks to us from the Word where we're at. We need the Bible. We need the sunsets, we need the miracles. We need to hear from other people and be inspired by music and art.

But we need the Word of God. That's how we really know who he is. They didn't give up until they found what they came for, which was to worship Jesus. And they needed the word of God to get them there. I'm guessing their journey was not without danger, weariness and struggles. But they kept on keeping on until they got there. Third point, they came to the house, not the manger. And a lot happened between the time Jesus was born and the time the Magi arrived. If you're interested, look at Luke 2 to what happened with Anna and Simeon in the temple. That was after Jesus was born, but before the Magi.

Historically likely Just timing wise before they arrived. Fascinating. It's a great story. It likely took the Magi quite a while to get to Jesus. Anyway, they came to the house, bowed down, and they worshiped Jesus.

Being warned in a dream, they returned by a different way than the one they had come by. Remember, they were asked to return to Herod, but God had a different plan. I see this as a really beautiful picture of what happens when we encounter Jesus. We arrive one way and we leave by another. When we come to encounter Jesus through the Word, through a sunset, we're different.

We come different. I mean, we leave different than the way we came. Something changes when we truly encounter Jesus. When we read something in the Word or sense him in the sunset, we're changed our habits, our attitudes, our thoughts, our motivations. We change the way we walk.

In the words of the customer service gal, it will be brighter than it is now. You will be brighter than you are now. When you encounter Jesus, something changes. So in summary, we're on a journey and he meets us where we're at to draw us to Himself. We are part of a bigger story, and our part matters.

Don't ever question that. God has purpose for you. Plan for you exactly the way you are. He speaks to us in so many ways. Be open to the unexpected.

The unexpected journey and happening to others. Words to sun rises, to seeing him in the sunset, to seeing him in the snow. Yes, I'm excited about the snow. Just saying to the stars, to reading the Bible. Be open to a new way of pursuing Jesus.

Expect to encounter him. Expect to be changed. And don't give up when the journey gets hard. Pursuing Jesus is always worth it. And when we truly encounter him in our change, we become that light that lead other people to understand the love of Jesus for them.

Amen. All right, I might be. This might be a stretch, but how many of you are J.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings fans? Okay.

Kind of what I guessed. Okay. Just saying. All right, so let me just kind of give you this quick synopsis of in the Two Towers. The Hobbit, Frodo, little guy, he's on this journey with his servant Sam.

Okay, I see a smile. Do you know the Fellowship of the Rings? Right there, I'm looking at you guys. So they're on this journey and their job is to return this gold ring to the country that it was forged in, to have it just destroyed so that evil will be eradicated. Okay, that's kind of where we're jumping into the story.

And this journey is perilous. It's dangerous and it goes on and on and on and that's. They're trying to eradicate the evil in a ring. And for those of you know, it's the Ring, right? So Frodo is ready to give up.

He's had enough, this Hobbit. It's his job to do it. And Frodo says, I can't do this, Sam. And Sam says this. I know.

It's all wrong. By rights, we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo.

The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing this shadow.

Even darkness must pass. A new day will come when the sun shines. Or in this case, a star. And it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you.

They meant something. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now.

Folk in those stories had a lot of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going because they were holding onto something. Frodo says. What were they holding onto? Sam and Sam says.

That there is some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for. I would suggest that the Magi kept going. Not just for good but for the promise of encountering Jesus.

And that, my friends, is worth fighting for. Embrace the journey. Be led by the light of God and His word. Expect to encounter him. Be changed.

Amen. Let's pray.

Jesus, we thank you for the light that you are. The light that you came into the world, into our lives. Lord, you speak to us where we are in the good times and the hard times. You lead us to come into an encounter with you. Lord, we believe that you will.

We are open to what you want to do in our lives. How you want to change us and shape us.

That we might be the light in this world drawing people to you. And in the chorus of We Three Kings O star of wonder, Star of night Star with royal beauty bright Westward leading, still proceeding Guide us to Thy perfect light. Guide us to you, Lord, we pray.

Amen.

Go in peace. The Word of God dwells in you richly. Thanks be to God.