

*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.*

Last week I was sitting in my car outside a restaurant waiting for a takeout order, doing what I often do while I wait for things - scrolling aimlessly on my phone. It was a beautiful evening, warm outside. I had my sunroof open, enjoying the evening song of the birds as I waited. Then I noticed a young man come out of the restaurant and hold his phone up toward the heavens. I thought he was trying to get a signal but then I saw he was taking pictures and gazing intently up at the sky. He opened the door and spoke to someone, and a young woman came out. She too looked up at the sky, although with less enthusiasm, and they watched and chatted and then both went back inside. It was only then that I looked up at the sky to see what had captured their attention and there in the purple-pinks of the fading sun, was an incredibly bright star...and large...dominating the sky. It was beautiful and it didn't escape me that here I sat, right under that star, but I hadn't noticed it until I saw someone else point it out. If I hadn't looked up, I would have missed it. If I hadn't noticed those people, I would have missed it.

How easy it is to miss something beautiful, even when it is hanging right over our heads.

I love Matthew's story of the Magi. This is not JUST a story of wise men seeking Jesus...that fits nicely on a bumper sticker...but the story is also deeper. This is a story of global impact, a story of respectful diversity, a story of mutual celebration and radical generosity and heart-felt worship. It is a story about our proper response when confronted with God's inbreaking into our world...a reminder that there is nothing to fear but every reason to rejoice when that happens. It is a story that everyone would have missed, had the wise men failed to look up AND to be curious about what they saw there.

Thanks be to God, they did look up and they were curious. So, they set out to follow the star...looking up...watching...paying attention. And just like me in my car the other night, when we see others look up, we look up as well.

Some estimate the wise men's journey took up to two years to complete. Can we imagine how many people in those two years asked, "What are you looking at? Where are you going?" and each time they could say, "Something amazing has happened. We are going to find it."

For centuries the prophets had spoken of a promised Messiah, born in the line of David in the town of Bethlehem...but no one was watching. No one thought to look at a young couple, burdened with a long journey to suit Caesar's whim of a census. No one was looking at an unwed girl, swollen with child. No one was looking in manger stalls, and darkened streets. No one was looking out at the world and expecting to see God.

But no one was looking up either. No one seemed to have their eyes turned toward the heavens to see a glimpse of the glorious. No one was curious about new things appearing. No one was focused on going anywhere except where they were told by Caesar to go. No one was looking up, past the mountain upon which Jerusalem sat, past the palace that Herod claimed.

Had it not been for the wise men - the world might have missed it.

The shepherds knew. God made sure the lowly and the marginalized knew. The Angels made sure those who most needed the good news of a savior heard it. But when God does something so incredible as come to earth in flesh...the wealthy and powerful, the nationalities and principalities need to know as well.

God may have slipped into the world in a tiny, unassuming package...but God's coming was not meant to be kept a secret. "Let us go see this thing..." was uttered by shepherd and wise man alike. Let us go see what God is doing.

This is my prayer for all of us in 2025 - that it will be a year guided by our desire to keep watch and look up and see what God is doing in the world around us. It is my prayer that our searching for God doesn't take us to government buildings or political policies but that we will look up to a higher power and a more righteous truth.

It is my prayer that God's continued revelation will be noticed, even in the smallest, poorest, most unassuming places, and that we can celebrate what we find there - God at work, God saving us, God revealing God's self to us in ways that are life giving, meaningful, and transformative.

Fear not, God is with you...may that be prayer every time we look up.