

The Rev. Seth Dietrich
January 7, 2023 - Epiphany Sunday

All-Ages Sermon: Chalking the Doors of our Hearts

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Epiphany. And we get to hear this amazing story of the Magi, the wise men who searched and searched for the young child Jesus.

Now we don't know too much about the Magi. We don't know how many there were, although the stories passed down over thousands of years say there were 3 and their names were Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar.

- 1) We do know they were from a far away place that would have been very different from the place where Mary and Joseph and Jesus lived. They would have looked different, dressed different, spoken a different language, different customs, different foods, different music, different beliefs. We don't even know if they believed in God, or if they did what they believed.
- 2) We also know they were people who studied the stars in the sky. Astronomers, maybe astrologers.

One day they see a very strange star they have never seen before, and they check their books and their charts and they talk to each other and they say: this star is for the birth of a new king in the far away land of Israel. So they say let us go and see this king. So they travel. Maybe they walked. Maybe they took donkeys, maybe camels, maybe they came another way. But they think to themselves, if there is a new king, he must be in the city with all the important people, all the people with power and money and big houses and nice chariots. The kind of place a king would be born. So they go to Jerusalem.

Now there is already a King in Jerusalem, Herod the Great. And they say we have seen this star and all our books and charts say that a different king has been born, please tell us where he is, we want to see him.

Now Herod, the ruler of Jerusalem, thinks to himself, Wait a minute, I'm the king. A new king, that sounds not good for me. Very bad. Herod is afraid. And he is insecure. Herod does some terrible things in another story for another day. As a side note, some of the worst things in the world are done by insecure men with a lot of power. Anyway, Herod plays all nice, and he's like, "Oh, a new king you say, that sounds wonderful. Tell you what, I don't know where he is, but when you Magi find him, you come back and tell me about him." Herod wanted to capture that king so he could be the only king.

The Magi leave Herod and they see the star again and they follow it, and they follow it, and it leads farther and farther away from Jerusalem. The star leads them farther out into the country

where there are fewer lights, more space, more animals, and farms. Way out away from where they expected. And then finally the star stops over a small village, its actually the village of Nazareth, not Bethlehem. And the star is over the house of the new king. I wonder what it was like for them, after such a long journey, that had taken them so far, when they finally went up to that house to knock on the door.

Now for every story you can think about the action from different characters perspectives. Let's think about Joseph and Mary on the other side of the door, before the knock. They are back in their village of Nazareth. Not in Bethlehem anymore. Jesus is not a baby anymore. Somewhere between 1 and 2. Crawling around the house. Walking around the house. Maybe has a few words. And imagine Mary and Joseph see these strange men coming up to the door. Different skin color, different hair, different dress. These are foreigners, strangers, non-Jews. And Mary and Joseph opened the door. Mary and Joseph welcomed them in. And then the most amazing thing happened.

The wise men present the most wonderful treasures. Gold. Frankincense (like our incense) and myhrr. And the Magi bowed down to the child king. No one in any story had ever bowed down to the Christ before.

We can be like the Magi, searching, searching, searching for Jesus, knowing Jesus often shows up where we do not expect, in people we do not expect.

And we can be like Mary and Joseph who opened the door. Amazing things happen when you open the door of your heart to all people: people who look different, eat different, dress different, believe different, vote different, live in different places, people who live further away from the big cities. Jewish people, Muslim people, Buddhists, Atheists, people who don't believe in God, I learn so much from so many different kinds of people.

MLK learned non-violence from Gandhi, a Hindu. I learn so much from people who see the world differently than me. I've become better at opening the doors of my heart. Looking for the Christ in them. You can get better at it. I am living proof.

We are just beginning a new year, 2024. And of all years, this is a year when you want to say, "I'm going to try my best to open the doors of my heart to all people." Not just people in my little tribe. When everyone is mobilizing for war, armoring up, pulling up the draw bridge, making room. We need Jesus help for this.

Ancient practice called "chalking the door". A little way you can remember to open the door of your heart. Ancient practice, people have been doing it for a long time.

Above the door:

20 + C + M + B + 24

Casper

Melchior

Balthasar

Christus

Mansionem

Benedictus

Marks you house so you can remember to keep your heart open. Mark our church so we can remember this place is open to all people - we can learn from them.