

Happy New Year! Today we celebrate, "The Epiphany of the Lord." "Epiphany," comes from the word, "Reveal." God reveals Himself to us, especially the Gentile people, who mostly of us are descended from, through his Son, Jesus Christ. During this feast, we remember the Magi, the wise men, known for "Looking up," focused on the heavens, and looking for God's signs.

"Looking up," helps us see the big picture of our lives and with a New Year starting, help us find our way in this distracting world. Our reading from Isaiah says, "Darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon YOU the LORD shines, and over YOU appears his glory." This is God revealing Himself to each of us in the New Year. What can we take away from the story of the Magi to help us engage the Lord this year?

Since most stars don't change their location from night to night, year-to-year, what were the Magi looking for in the night sky? The answer is, the planets, known as, "wondering stars." With their orbit around our Sun, they follow a predictable pattern and from time-to-time, they do amazing things, like, "The Star of Bethlehem."

On very rare occasions, three planets, or wandering stars, align, and they stand fixed in the night's sky. The Magi were looking for this occurrence because they believed that such an event was associated with the birth of royalty. In the case of the Star of Bethlehem, there were 8 months between the first sighting and the time the star hovered over the home where Jesus and Mary were present.

The gospel quotes the Magi saying, "We saw His star at its rising." This is the clue that the multi-planet, "Star of Bethlehem" was going to make an appearance. Astronomer Michael Molnar believes that the wise men were, in fact, very wise and mathematically adept astrologers. It is likely that the Magi also followed the prophecy of a new king to be born of the family of David, and had been watching the skies for many years awaiting the star's appearance.

So, the Magi see the star at its rising, but not knowing where it was going to later appear, they travel to Jerusalem, based on the prophecy. Their investigation is a long shot, and they are likely disappointed when they arrive in Jerusalem and no one knows the whereabouts of this newborn king, not even the current king, Herod.

This is how our spiritual lives sometime go. We take time to look up, and we feel God is leading us somewhere, but we just don't get all the details at once. It's like we have the "Save the Date" but never received the address where God wants to meet us.

But then, in the case of the Magi, something miraculous happens, "After their audience with King Herod they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was." We are told, "They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his

mother." The second half of the invitation finally arrived, and their lifetime quest of connecting heavenly bodies with an earthly king becomes a reality!

This is an example of an epiphany! Our elusive God literally connects the dots with stars, and points the Magi to His Son, the King of the Universe. Walking into the house to see Jesus, the Magi must have known, maybe for the first time, that they were in the right place, at the right time, a life-changing encounter as they pay homage to the Lord.

If we open ourselves to the Father in the same way, by looking up, and reading the signs in our lives, we too may encounter God's love in a way that changes our lives forever. St Paul says in today's 2nd reading, "It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." We are among the blessed, the believers, who are here today, to encounter the risen Christ, by looking up (at the crucifix). We are here to seek a greater purpose in our lives. We are here on the first week of the New Year, to have an epiphany, and to make plans for 2025 like the Magi did, two millennium ago.

It could take the form of saying yes to a wedding proposal, or renewing our vows from years ago. To receiving a newborn child into our home, or an aging parent who needs our help. It could be a call to shore up our prayer life and make time to pray before the blessed sacrament or at daily mass. Whatever it is, it's the connection to God's will that makes the epiphany real.

Maybe it's in becoming more educated like the Magi, through study at the parish or diocesan level. We are blessed at St. James, to have many of our clergy actively involved in parish and diocesan courses to bring us closer to Christ. And if that doesn't fit your schedule, we also have access to programs like the Bible in a year and the Catechism in a year by Father Mike Schmitt.

The world can sometimes feel like the words from Isaiah, "darkness covers the Earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples." Yet, we can avoid the cloud covering us, if do as Isaiah says, "Raise your eyes and look about you." If we take our faith seriously, looking up, will keep our hearts from losing hope.

And like the Magi, seeing the star at it's rising, when we noticed the hand of God in our lives, we need to be ready to begin the journey and leave our old lives and our old selves behind. Make a New Year's resolution, replace something old with something new. Like the Magi, follow the star with patience and discipline. Let's ask ourselves, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews?" He's here, and will reveal himself to us when the time is right.

Like the Magi, when we encounter him, let's be ready to prostrate ourselves and present our gifts, the treasures we carry in our hearts. And like the Magi, we will return home, full of joy, to share our story with everyone we know.