

# “When the Angels Song is Stilled...”

*(Based on New Year and Matthew 2:1-12)*

This line is from the hymn, I am the Light of the World we will sing today. The whole verse goes...”When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and the shepherds have found their way home, the work of Christmas is begun:”

So perhaps we are given a small reprieve today as we are still remembering the star and the kings. Maybe our Christmas isn’t quite done yet, but I am guessing it soon is.

Yesterday saw the Dickson family putting away the Christmas decorations at least the indoor ones. ☺ Some of you have been writing annual report submissions for 2023. Others of you have been buying your calendar or breaking in your new journal book. The New Year is only 7 days old and yet our focus is turning to what is ahead.

Last year at this time I invited you to take a star word home with you or to email me with a number between 1 and 162 to receive one. This word is one you are invited to reflect on, rail against, or question. The hope is you would work with it. I wish I had recorded people’s reflections on their star words because at different points of the year people like you would tell me about their word – be, radiate, listen, renew. (If anyone would care to share their word’s teaching, please drop me a note. Let me know if it would be okay to share it too.) What I found amazing is how your star word has been in the background of many of our thoughts and reflections for the year.

So, I will invite you to choose a new word for this year. For our friends at home, email a number to me between 1 and 162 and I will send you your star word. If you wish to call the office that works too. For those here, (you can choose one on your way out).

The star was the guiding point for the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. The Star and the Magi visit with us today. They share part of their journey with us. We hear again:

“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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.”

The story of the wise ones, stargazers, magi is often used on this week closest to January 6 when the celebration of epiphany is. Epiphany is a time of sudden insight or new understanding, an “Aha” moment to quote Diana Butler Bass. It finds its roots in Greek, meaning “to reveal” or “to be manifest”. The star is often a symbol of this light, this moment of insight or discovery.

So as a renewed challenge and a way to use the star words I picked three out of the collection of 162 to form this sermon. The three words this year are: wisdom, self-awareness, and wholeness, and using the three magi I often some reflection.

(Placing the magi figurine on pulpit) Magi 1:

Journal entry: I and my companions have been on this journey of following this star for about a year --371 days to be exact. I am starting to question myself a little. Was this the smartest thing I could be doing with my time? I have been known to be a smart person. Numbers come easily for me. I have a good memory for events and names. People would seek me out if they had a problem to solve or a question needing an answer. Being smart is part of who I understand myself to be. It helps to define me. Yet the other day on our travels as we were getting some supplies at a local market, someone asked, "what I was doing."

I told them about a king to be born. We were following his natal star. It had brought us this way. The man I told laughed. He blurted out that is the craziest thing I have ever heard.

"You mustn't be very smart."

He walked away, laughing, and shaking his head.

It hit a sensitive part of me, I guess. What if the world thought I was crazy for doing this? What if people thought less of me? What if this isn't the smartest thing I could do! It has troubled me.

As we sat around the evening fires, I shared my doubt with my fellow travelers. One of them offered this insight, "The fear of looking stupid is the No. 1 killer of dreams. The worst part? The people who make you feel stupid are usually the ones least qualified to judge someone else's life." --Anthony Moore

That sounded like wise advice. It helped, as I pondered that question -- did the risk of looking stupid limit me? Would I stop following my dream of meeting this future king which the heavens' announced, for a laughing man I met once in the market?

The star appeared shortly after and again its light seems to say to me, I have more to show you. Follow me. Maybe wisdom is different than being smart. It is about letting God teach you the power of dreams and there is more than just being smart. I will see what the year ahead will teach me.

(Placing the next magi figurine on pulpit) Magi 2: Oh, my aching feet. They have been bothering for quite some time now. They may be from my new stylish boots I purchased a few weeks back. I think I may have gotten a size one too small. Or it could be from something else. One of the medical people on the journey with us thinks I may have a disease of the kidneys (a minister injection here – modern day diabetes). The medical person shared I need to keep a close eye on my feet. This disease can cause complications. He even told me sometimes people lose part of their leg. I really need my feet and my legs for this journey. I need to really pay attention to what my body is telling me. No one else can do this for me.

Sometimes in my haste, in my desire to be fashionable, to be thought of more highly, I don't always do the best things for me or the right things in the circumstances. Becoming more self-aware would serve me better.

I think I will change into more sensible footwear for the rest of this journey. If I could beg your pardon as I change.

(Placing the magi figurine 3 on pulpit) Magi 3:

My companions and I have been in a reflective space these past few days. One was thinking about wisdom over being smart. The other changed his shoes to be more practical for a long journey. He seemed to also be more aware of taking time to eat, sleep and rest. It is about time; he hasn't been taking the best care of himself.

Me, you ask. What have I been reflecting on? I have been thinking about the type of person I am becoming. I always thought my life was pretty good. And truthfully it was; it is. Yet when the chance for following the star came, something inside me said you need to go on this journey. I am not sure what was prompting me to notice – a restlessness of spirit, a settling for the way life is, rather than the possibilities of what it could be, or the fact life has more to show me. Yet somehow knew I would need to risk taking that first step. So, I said yes. I am all-in for the star following adventure!

And when I think of where the star has guided me, us, I have learned so much in the past year. I have seen people I would never have seen. I have eaten foods that are delicious and unique. I have discovered new languages and I have grown as person. Grown not just in knowledge but about life – facing fears, tackling hardships, building friendships, overcoming tensions and frictions that travelling and closeness can bring. It feels like parts of my living have filled in some empty spaces, other parts have been smoothed off from the rough and prickly parts of me, some of me just feels more able to face life with laughter, confidence, and reassurance that I will be okay. Perhaps it has helped having companions to talk things over with and to work things through with. The star's light seems to be guiding not only my steps but my spirit too. Somehow this journey has made me feel more connected to myself, to others, the universe. My servant says I am more whole. I think that may be the perfect word I am becoming more whole. I sense this journey of the star will continue to keep calling me to this wholeness path.

We are heading off soon for our nightly trek. Please excuse my need to leave you now.

Three star words, three reflections on life. 2024 offers us an opportunity to let God lead us this year – our 150<sup>th</sup> year as a congregation. How might God be leading me -- you -- us to take risks, use our resources, meet new people, share the news of Jesus' birth in the world?

Where are we struggling to keep going? How might we help one another on the journeys before us?

The star of the magi, the light of God's future beckons again today. What is the work of Christmas awaiting you in 2024?

I am curious to find out, how about you?

***Sermon written by Rev. Bruce Dickson and delivered at Dublin Street United Church, Guelph, ON January 7, 2024. Permission is given for personal use or group study.***