

1/6/2019

“Where and How is God Leading You?”

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany Sunday

Theme: As we begin a new year, it is good to reflect, pray, and act upon God's leading.

As I shared in this month's newsletter, when I consider the new year ahead, I always wonder a bit where and how God will be leading me, those whom I love and know already, as well as those whom God will place in the path of life's journey ahead. Perhaps you feel the same.

Today is Epiphany, “the day Christians remember the coming of the Magi to visit Jesus, bringing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

It occurs on Jan. 6 every year, the 13th day of the Christmas season. The word ‘epiphany,’ from the Greek word *epiphania*, means appearance or manifestation.

The arrival of these visitors was a sign that the incarnation of God in Christ had been made known and was recognized by the heavens to the whole world, so that even Gentile wise men from the East came to pay him homage. This is an observance of great majesty, solemnity and awe.

“An even more ancient Christian celebration than Christmas, Epiphany originally focused on the nativity, God's incarnation (God made flesh) in the birth of Jesus Christ and Christ's baptism. After the late fourth century, as Advent developed as a season of baptismal preparation in addition to Lent, Epiphany became associated with baptism. This is why we see images of the three Magi on many older baptismal fonts.”

(Ask the UMC, Untied Methodist Communications, 2019)

† The Magi were led by a “star” they believed would lead them to a newborn king, bringing gifts to honor him.

The Magi, or kings as they are sometimes called, are mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew. Few details are given, and most of our ideas about them come from tradition or speculation. Scripture doesn't say how many wise men there were; it is generally assumed three, since they brought three gifts.

They came to find and honor the one they believed was born to be the Messiah king. With determination, they followed a star, which led them to Jesus. Most believe that Jesus was no longer an infant, as he is called a child, and was found in a home with Joseph and Mary.

Their gifts symbolize Christ's identity and mission: gold for a king, incense for God, and myrrh, used to anoint the dead.

† We may be led in various ways, to encounter and honor God in Jesus Christ in the new year ahead.

Now, I know that when we think about a new year, many of us think in terms of making resolutions. We resolve to set goals and do some things differently to achieve those goals or make our lives better in one way or another. And, that's usually fine. We have good intentions, and hopefully can follow through on them. The drawback is that we might get discouraged, and even consider ourselves foolish or failures, if we have difficulty or are unable to reach those resolutions.

As Jack Shitama shared in his New Year's post, he is not big on New Year's resolutions, but nevertheless, also finds himself enthusiastic and hopeful. He says "the key is to turn those thoughts into actions." He offers a couple of very good recommendations in how to do that.

I also like to think holistically -- in terms of spirit, mind and body. Therefore, when I ask "Where and how is God leading you in 2019?", I'm not just talking about religiously; but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

When we think about where God might be leading us, what new goals might we be embracing? What new and better habits of time, health, finances or other gifts might we hope to develop? What new people and better relationships might help or encourage us be more the person God, and we ourselves, really want us to be? What new ideas and interests might we be drawn to? And most importantly for me and I hope for you as well, will all of these draw me closer to God, closer to Jesus?

When I think about how God is leading us, I know that he often uses circumstances, even difficult or painful ones, to get us to stop and think about things. That's not to say that God is responsible for all of our circumstances. But, God is certainly there with us and for us in whatever the circumstances of life. We can learn, grow and even thrive in and from adversity.

As in today's gospel story, we can also see that God uses external signs and means, often through nature and creation. God uses communication through others: as through caring family, good friends, pastors, teachers, and others.

God uses scripture and other sources of prophecy and wisdom to guide and lead us. That's why daily reading and devotionals are important. Along with that are the practices of prayer and meditation – becoming more aware of our own thoughts and feelings and communicating with God directly. God speaks through the calm small voice and sometimes even through dreams and visions. And, always remember that God has sent the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us in these ways.

We also use all of these ways as we journey together . . . this year drawing ever nearer to Christ . . . so that as a congregation of faith, we may come and honor him with the gifts that we bring and give him.

Personally, I plan to change how I handle some of the excess emails that eat up time and attention on my email accounts. I'm not talking so much about personal contact or requests from others I know. I'm talking mostly about the repetitive ads and even articles that are not really a priority right now, so that I can see and focus on the ones that are. I also want to have more of a positive connection and sharing on social media: like a mid-week message follow-up story I have or find. That means I need to learn and practice new routines. You can help by praying for me . . . nothing long and complicated!☺

So . . .

Where and how has God led you already? Where and how is God leading you now?
How might you know for sure?

How is God leading you closer to Jesus, to God's own self? Are you following the light of God to find Jesus right now?

What gifts do you bring and give to honor the Christ?

Continue or join in the journey this year. See where and how God will lead you in mysterious and marvelous ways! Amen.