

The Baptism of Our Lord

Mathew 3:13-17

The Three Astrologers

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Adapted from Christian Century

HOMILY

We have heard many words and traversed through many feelings and sung many songs today. So, I will attempt to keep this very short...I read the following essay in Christian Century this week, and it was so timely, given our visits to each other's parishes, that I had to share it with you.

First century Judea was a multi-religious society. In port cities and along trading routes, not entirely unlike Middletown here along the CT River...varied faith traditions encountered one another, discovering their differences and their common ground. The Gospels depict many of these interfaith connections. One of these stories is the story of the Magi which we just heard. The Magi were not kings however but astrologers. How interfaith is that! They were Babylonian or Persian star gazers... perhaps of the Zoroastrian faith. They looked at the night sky and saw something that others *didn't see* and then traveled to a distant land *to encounter it*. They left the comfort of their own tradition, crossed religious boundaries and entered the Jewish court of King Herod and eventually met a family and a baby suffused with light.

As the season of Epiphany begins, we can learn much from the Magi about how to cross boundaries and be in closer relationship with strangers, *even when our journeys are just across a parking lot*.

The Magi offers us 6 very specific starry pointers to help guide us across our boundaries comfort zones.

Star 1

Be willing to initiate. To travel. To go to the neighbor's house first. And I want to thank all of you from First Church who came here today. And all of you from CHT who ventured out to First Church last week. I know I had a wonderful experience in your sanctuary. Its round shape felt like arms of God around me. It seems like a small thing but

it wasn't. Worshiping in each other's holy spaces is a big deal and it gives me great hope for the church.

Star 2

Be curious.

The Magi knew of a prophecy relating to the birth of a king of the Jews, but they were not familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. Our experience is deepened when we take the initiative to *ask good questions of those who know their traditions best*, rather than making assumptions about what everything means.

Star 3

Recognize the holy in the other. We may not always be able to participate fully in our neighbors' worship, but we can still experience the numinous in our encounters. We can honor the sacred as *they* experience it. And even try some things on.

Star 4

Bring your best to the encounter. The Magi brought precious gifts. We can offer the gift of our hearts and minds wide open.

Star 5

Take risks for the others well-being

This penultimate point struck me as truly profound: Not only for our friendly cross parking lot experiences for the longer journeys of understanding that we are called to make in the larger world, journeys that these inter-parish visits could help prepare us for: As we cross boundaries to heal our haunted histories of race for example
As we become willing to truly listen and have some compassion for a different political or generational points of view

As we become willing to stand under and understand new forms of gender expression and sexuality.

Just think:

It would have been so easy, *so expected really* for those Magi to retrace their steps and return to Jerusalem as instructed, telling Herod exactly where to find Jesus. No skin off their backs! Herod even promised to be nice!

Instead, they chose to guard Jesus' location. To keep him safe. In a nation where Christians are still in the majority, we must pay attention to our neighbors' safety as they

practice other faiths...or other gender expressions and sexual identities and we must be willing to sacrifice, to take risks to protect their freedom. This is being part of the same holy body

Star 6

Expect to be changed. The Magi did not return by the same road. Our connections across difference are transformative. Afterwards *we will not go back exactly the same way either.* What a gift what a gift what a glorious gift that might be for all of us.

And what a profound way to affirm the legacy of a servant leader like Quentin Williams who worked tirelessly and compassionately and fearlessly for justice and joy as we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord and affirm that all of us are indeed one body.

Amen