

Congregational Church of Pinehurst
United Church of Christ
Epiphany Sunday
January 3, 2016*

Isaiah 60:1-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Dis-astron?

What happened to the star?

You know, the star that shown over Bethlehem
to guide the Magi to the manger
where the newborn Jesus lay?

It is the star of the story for a while, so to speak.
And then it just disappears,
never to be heard from again.

And that's our greatest nightmare, isn't it---
to be without a star---

without someone or something to guide us
out of the darkest places in our lives.

Whether it's the Bible or astrology,
or Fox News or MSNBC,
or the almanac or the Pope,
we all want someone or something to guide us.

As I shared with those of you

who attended the Longest Night Service,

I recently learned that the word ***disaster***
comes from the medieval word "disastron".¹

It's a compound word with "astron" meaning star
and the prefix "dis" meaning without.

So putting them together you get "without a star"---
disastron---from which we get disaster.

And living without a star,
without a compass to guide us,

often feels like a disaster,
or at least, a disaster waiting to happen.

But it's interesting to note,
that the moment the star has done its job
of leading the Magi to Jesus,
it's never seen or heard from again.
Maybe they didn't need the star anymore.
Maybe they could find their way home by memory now.
Maybe they had dropped bread crumbs.
Or maybe one of them had left the lights on at home.
Or maybe the star had not disappeared at all.
And maybe that is at least part of the point of Matthew's story.
Maybe the star was just a reflection of the divine light.
And maybe Jesus brought them,
and brings us,
the awareness that the divine light
is already within us as well.
Maybe Matthew's story of the Magi
is a parable to remind us that
we do all need a star to guide us.
But that star is not external to us,
but in reality lives within us.

Poet and spiritual teacher John Philip Newell,
whose interpretation of the Lord's Prayer,
we'll share together later in the service,
has described this shift in a helpful way.

*Divine light shines forth from this Child, he says.
But it should not so much be understood
as the appearance of God
as the transparence of God.
The divine light that shines in the Child
is not a foreign light to the earth.*

*It is the Light at the heart of all life.
It is the Light from which all things come.....
So this is a story about the Light at the heart of everything,
the Light at the heart of you,
the Light at the heart of me.²*

And because we bear the light
it makes it all the more important that we tend it.
That we tend it by taking care of our bodies.
That we tend it by exercising our minds.
That we tend it by honoring our emotions.
It is also important that we tend it
within a spiritual community
which honors and celebrates the light within each of us.
In the Christian tradition we tend the light within community
by journeying together
with our sacred stories in scripture,
by gathering around Table
to receive the nurture of the Christ life in our midst,
and by living life together
in ways that enable us to share our communal wisdom
so that our insights can be honed and sharpened
by the insights and intuitions of others.

I love the often quoted words of Shug Avery
in Alice Walker's book, The Color Purple.
*.....have you ever found God in church?, she says.
I never did.
I just found a bunch of folks hoping for him to show.
Any God I ever felt in church I brought in with me.
And I think all the other folks did too.
They come to church to share God,
not find God.³*

It's that notion of radical Incarnation,
that I believe the story of the Magi points us toward
as sure as the star pointed them to Jesus.
The notion that in the Christ Child,
we not only see God,
but we come to see that that same God
is in us all.
That same love and justice and peace
that we behold at the manger embodied in the Christ Child,
is birthed within us as well.
And in the grown up Jesus,
I see One who lived in such a way
as to help us embrace and unleash that light in all of us.

The Magi followed the star,
only to find that when they had indeed found the Light
it lived inside them as well.
They no longer had to look up to find the star,
they could look within
to find the Christ-light shining.
And empowered by a dream within
they returned home by another way.
A life changed by the Christ-light within.

So perhaps the medieval linguists were right.
To live without a star is indeed a dis-astron---a disaster.
But just because we can't see it in the sky,
doesn't mean that we are starless.
The Magi invite us to look within.
To look within ourselves.
To look within others.
To see if we cannot discover the Christ-light
shining brightly enough to pierce the night sky.

Artist and poet Jan Richardson
wrote a poem called Blessing of the Magi.
I want to offer each of you
a piece of that same blessing today.⁴

We cannot show you
the route that will
take you home;
that way is yours
and will be found
in the walking.

But we tell you
you will wonder
at how the light you thought
you had left behind
goes with you,
spilling from
your empty hands,
shimmering beneath
your homeward feet,
illuminating the road
with every step
you take.

So may your journey be.
Amen.

Rev. Brent A. Bissette

¹An insight from a reflection by the Rev. David Neil, Stillspeaking Daily Devotional, December 21, found at www.ucc.org .

²Quoted from his sermon, *The Light Within All Life*, preached on Day 1 Radio on January 6, 2013 and found at http://day1.org/4403-the_light_within_all_life .

³From Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

⁴From Jan Richardson's poem, *Blessing of the Magi* (2012), found on her website *The Painted Prayerbook* at <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2012/12/30/epiphany-blessing-of-the-magi/>

*I first preached this sermon on January 5, 2014 (Epiphany Sunday).