

Epiphany Sunday  
Text: Matthew 2:1-12  
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.  
January 4, 2009

### “Looking Farther than You Can See”

A family was driving through Kansas on vacation. Five-year-old Tyler was looking out the car window. “Boy,” he said, “it’s so flat out there, you can look farther than you can see.” That’s a Great phrase - especially for the first Sunday of a new year. “You can look farther than you can see.” And it’s true!

This time last year who could have seen Michael Phelps winning the most Gold Medals ever won in a Summer Olympics? An Economic Slump bigger than the depression? An African American being elected President? A former First Lady being appointed Secretary of State? The Iraqi war still continuing with no end in sight.

There is another saying: “If we knew then - what we know now!” If we knew the Stock Market would lose so much of our money, we would have arranged our finances differently. If we knew Barak Obama was going to be elected, we could have saved two years worth of campaigning. If we had known the Iraq War would have turned out the way it is turning out, different decisions might have been made. But we didn’t know then what we know now. But “You can look farther than you can see.”

A pastor led a thriving church. Many of its members were actively serving the surrounding community. When asked the secret of his success, the pastor responded, “I hold a crown above my people’s heads, and watch them grow up into it.” That’s the power of Vision. Nothing happens without vision.

Two men went fishing. One man was an experienced fisherman; the other wasn’t. Everytime the experienced fisherman caught a big fish, he put it in his ice chest to keep it fresh. Whenever the inexperienced fisherman caught a big fish, he threw it back. The experienced fisherman watched this go on all day and finally got tired of seeing this man waste good fish. “Why do you keep throwing back all the big fish you catch?” he asked. The inexperienced fisherman replied, “I only have a small frying pan.”

Sometimes, like that fisherman, we have no vision. We throw back the big plans, big dreams, big jobs, big opportunities that God gives us. Our faith is too small. We laugh at that fisherman who didn’t figure out that all he needed was a bigger frying pan; yet how ready are we to increase the size of our faith? The world hungers for people with vision, for people who look farther than they can see.

Today we commemorate the Epiphany - the day when the Wise Men followed the star that led them to the Christ Child. Now I don't want to burst any Christmas-Epiphany bubbles, nor do I want to discredit all of those manger scenes where the Kings are approaching on camel back - but it was most likely several years before the Wise Men arrived, and I doubt, or at least hope that Jesus was not still waiting in the manger.

And there are various speculations as to how this star was formed. In the year 7 B.C. the planets Jupiter and Saturn appeared very close together in the night sky, casting a bright glow similar to that of a single large star. The following year, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were also closely aligned. Some scholars believe one of these two events produced the bright light in the sky that the wise men followed when they came to Bethlehem two thousand years ago. You know the story - Star of wonder, star of night, Star with Royal Beauty Bright. Westward leading, still proceeding, Guide us to thy perfect light.

What fascinates me is, hundreds of thousands of other people living in that part of the world saw the same bright light in the sky, but they did not leave their homes to go find the newborn king. What was different about these 3 Kings? VISION.

This Sunday is called Epiphany on the church calendar, and it is a celebration of the coming of the magi. In our secular language, an "epiphany" is a new way of seeing or understanding. It is appropriate that we should begin a new year with an epiphany, a new way of seeing, a vision, an image of what our world can be, of what our lives can yet be. Like the magi of old, we need to open our minds, stretch our imaginations. The statesman Konrad Adenauer put it this way, "We all live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon." Today is a day for expanding our horizons, to scan the skies, to become searchers. Of course, there's danger. The world hates "the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. Who see things others cannot see." And be forewarned. Sometimes they crucify such persons.

As someone has said, "Those who dance appear insane to those who cannot hear the music." But this is where change begins, with those who are searching. They look farther than they can see. And when no one else can see it, they think you're crazy. But often Vision cannot be seen by others who have no vision.

50 years ago this congregation had a vision. If it were not for their vision those of you sitting in the back half of the church would have no seats. They had a Vision of a growing congregation that would need the extra seating that their present church lacked. Without that Vision we would be doing six Christmas Eve services instead of three. Can you imagine having to do twelve Boar's Head presentations instead of only six? But thanks to their vision we are able to meet the worshipping needs of this congregation. They were aware that you can look farther than you can see.

The wise men were searchers. They were looking farther than they could see. They were searchers who set out on a journey of faith. This is important because there are many journeys people take. Some people journey into alternative life-styles, some journey into alcohol and drugs.

The magi had a specific goal in mind for their journey. We find it in the very first verse of our lesson for today: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’”

No wonder we call them wise. They were looking for the Messiah, so that they might worship him. That is a journey of Faith. I want to challenge you today to set out on a journey of faith in this new year. Get deeper into our faith. Join a Bible study. Spend more time in prayer. Focus more intently in worship on God’s purpose for your life. The wise men were searchers who were on a journey of faith. Their goal was to bow before the newborn king. And when they found him, they bowed down before him and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These were expensive gifts. Maybe this is why tradition calls them the three kings. Some have treated these gifts as symbolic--gold to represent his kingship, myrrh - a spice whose one purpose is used in preparing a body for burial--was given to represent his death on the cross, and incense, as homage to God. Maybe this is true, we don’t know.

Neither do we know what became of the gifts. Maybe Joseph sold them to finance their perilous journey to Egypt. The Bible doesn’t say. And, it really doesn’t matter. These gifts represent, most of all, the magi’s devotion. They gave of themselves. That’s the key to life. Give of ourselves. Give ourselves to God. Give of ourselves to others. **LOOK FARTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE!**

Do we think that the Charter members of this congregation in 1752 could see what this congregation would become in 2009? When Henry Melchior Muhlenburg signed our Charter could he envision a church supporting international missionaries, helping unwed mothers, feeding the hungry, having to expand a parking lot to accommodate more cars and having a Cell Phone Tower in its Steeple? Do you think those who performed the 1<sup>st</sup> Boar’s Head Festival could see us doing it 30 years later? Even now, can we even envision how many people were Baptized in this place; Married in this place; Buried from this place, and heard the Word of God - in this place? Fortunately for us, they were able to look farther than they could see.

The Wise Men followed the light of the Star that led them on their Journey. It took them farther than they could see. But they were persistent and ended up in the presence of the Messiah. We enter into a New Year, a year more uncertain than most. But we are also called to follow the light. We are called to follow the light of Jesus Christ. And in so doing, we can look farther than we can see. But no matter how far we look - it’s not farther than God can see.

And faith comes in following the Light of Christ knowing that wherever it leads, that although we may not see the destination, God can. So we enter this new year with an Epiphany, an Epiphany that we can look farther than we can see. And in so doing, we can let our lights so shine before others that they can see our good works, and give glory to God in heaven as we continue to share the life - love - and joy - of Jesus Christ - our Light - with others. And ultimately - like with the 3 Wise Men we will also find ourselves in the presence of the Messiah.

Amen