

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk**

Text: **Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)**

Theme: ***Led by the Light***

Today's story is such a familiar one, I almost completely ignored it when looking over the myriad lectionary texts available to us for this 2nd Sunday after Christmas and this Tuesday's celebration of Epiphany. But, as we know, there is always more light to break forth from God's word, and this story is no exception.

Looking at our Hebrew passage from Isaiah, and the proclamation to "Arise" and "shine, for your light has come" makes me wonder if this wasn't part of what drove those three wise guys to follow the light of that same star. Surely, they had been driven to follow the star by the words of another prophet – the one called Micah, as they were surely as aware as Herod's chief priests and scribes of his words from the 5th chapter of Micah wherein he prophesied that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the shepherd king.

And so, being good servants of the present king, Herod, and accepting his exhortation, they agree to go find the promised leader in Bethlehem so that Herod, as he says, can also go to pay him homage. Sounds like the three naïve kings to me, but maybe they're just the three especially positive optimists; who's to say.

At any rate, King Herod is definitely following a different star, which would be the one he thinks HE is. AND, with his ego shining bright and driven by fear of being replaced, he sends all the kings horses and all the kings men to find this prophesied king and shatter him to pieces.

You see, when we allow our ego to be the guiding light of our lives and act out of one or many of our fears, we know our path is paved with the worst of intentions. Whenever we protect our own self interests over the clear intentions of God, we know we're heading down the wrong path and are sure to meet many an obstacle along the way as God provides us opportunity after opportunity to turn over the wheel (or the camel) and leave the driving to the One who knows the way and is wanting to guide us towards the light. "Lift up your eyes and look around," Isaiah says, "...then you shall see and be radiant (and) your heart shall thrill and rejoice because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you."

As humans, we definitely have a tendency to do some major navel gazing. It's easy to think we're the only ones in the world that really matter and know what we think is best for us. When the truth is, it's only through the giving of ourselves to others and seeking the way of the Christ that we truly discover our true identity and are rewarded with the riches of God's kin-dom thereby receiving the greatest satisfactions of the soul.

But God has also gifted us with intellect and intuition and calls to us to wake up and pay attention to what it is we are giving and to whom we are giving as well. Is the person requesting something of us doing so out of their own devotion to God or are they caught in the web of the ego and making their request out of fear and fecklessness? Sometimes I think we are so eager to give away what we have and know that we neglect to ask God for direction in that area as well. How many times have I seen what I have had to say or give turned against me or someone else? If I had taken some time to check in with God and sit in silence with the Spirit before responding to a request, perhaps I would have answered in a different way and known how to respond out of God's leading rather than my own desperation to please and ingratiate myself.

Father Richard Rohr, one of the best progressive Christian writers and thinkers of our day, talks about this in an essay I read recently called "Silence as the Heart of Prayer." "...The ego gets what it

wants with words," he writes. "The soul finds what it needs in silence. The ego prefers full solar light—immediate answers, full clarity, absolute certitude, moral perfection, and undeniable conclusions. The soul, however, prefers the subtle world of shadow, the lunar world that mixes darkness and light together, or as the Book of Wisdom more poetically puts it... "When peaceful silence lay over all, and when night had run half way her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word." (Book of Wisdom 18:14-15)

I find it fascinating that it was the light of a star that led these wise men to the place where Jesus was born, and actually decided to follow it and see where it led. How often in our own lives, I wonder, do we sense a light shining and decide to actually follow it and see where it leads? How often does fear get in our way, or, more likely, how often do we actually sit or stand still in the silence so that we can sense the light shining for us and find the inner guidance and courage to follow it?

I never thought I'd quote Lemony Snickett, but you never know where the inspiration will come from, and so I offer you this from his author, Daniel Handler: "There are times to stay put, and what you want will come to you, and there are times to go out into the world and find such a thing for yourself."

As we embark on this brand spanking New Year, I want to encourage each of us to look for the light of our own star, placed there by God who is surely ever guiding us onward and asking us to seek for the best path not only for ourselves but for those around us and all who live on this tiny planet hurtling through space.

Where are you being asked to arise and shine and accept that the glory of our God has shone upon you? Who are you being asked to become in your own bright shining life that you may give glory to God and thereby be a beacon for others lost in the darkness?

"Isaiah 60 speaks of divine radiance emerging in a challenging time" Dr. Bruce Epperly writes. "After a period of darkness, God's light is coming. God's light is emerging. But, we need to get up off our feet. We need to greet God's light actively. Grace leads to action; revelation leads to movement."

Let's together make 2015 the year we actively listen for God's guidance. Make a place for intentional silence in your life each day and see where God is shining the light of a leading star for you. Then, let's follow it together, supporting each other along the way and benefitting from the light shining for each of us and making clear the path to our fulfillment not only as individuals but as a church.

"What you have been waiting for is here, right now and in this place. The light shines in around you, but also within you. Let it come forth. The transforming power of light and love will bring new events into our lives and the world," Dr. Epperly writes. "The seeds of transformation are scattered all around us, calling us to become gardeners of creation and nurturers of new life in all its forms."

## The Map You Make Yourself

by Jan Richardson

You have looked  
at so many doors  
with longing,  
wondering if your life  
lay on the other side.

For today,  
choose the door  
that opens  
to the inside.

Travel the most ancient way  
of all:  
the path that leads you  
to the center  
of your life.

No map  
but the one  
you make yourself.

No provision  
but what you already carry  
and the grace that comes  
to those who walk  
the pilgrim's way.

Speak this blessing  
as you set out  
and watch how  
your rhythm slows,  
the cadence of the road  
drawing you into the pace  
that is your own.

Eat when hungry.  
Rest when tired.  
Listen to your dreaming.  
Welcome detours  
as doors deeper in.

Pray for protection.  
Ask for the guidance you need.

Offer gladness  
for the gifts that come  
and then  
let them go.

Do not expect  
to return  
by the same road.  
Home is always  
by another way  
and you will know it  
not by the light  
that waits for you

but by the star  
that blazes inside you  
telling you  
where you are  
is holy  
and you are welcome  
here.

Amen.