

Sermon: “Following the Star”

(Matthew 2:1–12)

When I grew up, trust came easily. Mom would send us out for hours to play in the woods and walk the roads without worrying about us. I don’t know whether that was trust or simply naïveté. My father would watch Walter Cronkite, and whatever he said, that was the truth. Parents trusted the judgement and the word of teachers. Neighbors looked out for each other.

Now we live in a sea of information but a drought of trust. My daughter was taught how to interact with a suspicious world. Everyone claims to have the facts, yet every “fact” seems to come with a spin. News, politics, religion — all tangled with suspicion. We scroll endlessly, but do we really find wisdom?

That’s why the story of the Magi matters. They were seekers too, educated, well-resourced, and weary of half-truths. But they dared to ask: *Where is the real King? Where does genuine hope come from? Where does truth, a way forward for humanity, really lie?* The Magi’s journey holds a mirror up to ours.

Matthew says that wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem asking, “Where is the one born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose.”

They start with what they know—a star, a sign—but it leads them to what they don’t expect: not a palace, not power, not an argument, not more information or data, but a person.

Herod, the king with all the data and advisors, trembles at the news of a baby being born. He calls the priests and scribes, those who should know Scripture best, but none of them moves an inch toward Bethlehem.

Meanwhile, these outsiders — Gentiles, astrologers, people far from the faith — continue to follow the light. They moved from a palace to a humble home, from speculation to adoration. They bow, not to Herod’s throne, but to a toddler in his mother’s arms.

Matthew’s story contrasts those who know with those who seek. The Magi act: the scholars stay put and speculate.

Here’s the gospel surprise: the wise men aren’t wise because they read the stars. They are wise because they recognize light when they see it.

Wisdom, Matthew shows us, is not about mastering information; it’s about surrendering to revelation. Herod has knowledge but no wisdom. The priests have Scripture but no movement. The Magi, outsiders led by a mysterious light, have the humility to bow.

And that’s the Aha: God meets seekers where they are and turns their seeking into worship. The same God who arranged the stars for them arranges circumstances for us, nudging, guiding, revealing in ways we don’t expect.

Maybe our problem isn't that we lack truth, but that we're looking for it in the wrong place. True wisdom isn't found by scrolling for the latest answers; it's found by kneeling before Christ.

So what does it mean for us to follow the star in this new year?

First, it means seeking, keeping our hearts open to where God is already shining light. Like the Magi, we don't have to have perfect theology to start the journey. We just have to move.

Second, it means obeying and changing direction when the Spirit redirects us. Our church has begun such a journey. Encouraging one another to assume additional roles in supporting ministry will be essential to sustaining PUMC's vitality in a culture that continues to sideline religious commitment and traditional religious leadership. Partnering with new guides and listening to one another is another. We are saying to God, "Lead us to where You are already at work."

Finally, it means worshiping, giving of ourselves freely. The Magi's gifts weren't payment; they were praise. In every act of generosity, every moment of awe, we too declare that Jesus is our true King.

So let's follow the light, not of our own cleverness but of divine grace. Let's trust that if we seek sincerely, God will meet us in unexpected places, perhaps not in palaces of power but in homes of humility, maybe not in headlines but in hearts that still kneel before Christ.

And here is where hope quietly enters the story.

We human beings have always had a strange and stubborn gift.
We take the broken pieces of life and try to put them back together again.
Not always perfectly. Not always like new.
Sometimes scared. Sometimes changed.
And sometimes, if we're honest, even stronger than before.

That's not naïve optimism.
That's the human spirit.

And for us, it is more than instinct. It is a vocation.

We believe we are created in the image of God.
And if God creates, then so can we,
not out of nothing, but out of fragments,
out of trust, out of hope, out of faith.

Like the Magi, we do not see the whole road.
We see enough light to take the next step.

**We comprehend only enough of the greater puzzle to fit in the next piece,
with fear and trembling,
not certainty or pride,
but through the humble tones of service
and love enfleshed.**

And sometimes that is how God makes or remakes new worlds.

Through hope.

Through trust.

Through faith.

And the people of God say, Amen.