

## FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY, YEAR A, JANUARY 4, 2026

At this time of the year there are three holidays that intersect with each other that have one common denominator and that is lights. Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanza all share the theme of lights in their stories.

Hannukah is all about the rededication of the temple after the Greeks had been defeated and how one day's worth of oil burned for eight days. The miracle of light is celebrated during this holiday. Kwanza is all about 7 principles lighting a candle each day for one of the principles that include unity to faith. Of course, Christmas celebrations are centered around the star that lit the way for shepherds and wisemen to find their way to the true light of the world – Jesus.

It is no coincidence that all these celebrations center around light because we live in a world, just like our ancestors did, that knows darkness well. Not only the darkness of winter evenings, but the darkness of uncertainty, fear, injustice, and grief. When life grows dim, we instinctively begin to look for light—something to guide us, reassure us, tell us which way to go.

That longing for light is not new. It is ancient. And on Epiphany, the Church celebrates the moment when God answered that longing—not with a spotlight or a blazing sun, but with a star, and ultimately with a child. Epiphany is about revelation. It is about God making Godself known. And it is about what happens when people dare to seek and follow God's light.

Matthew tells us that “wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising.’”

These were not Israelites. They were outsiders—foreign scholars, astronomers, seekers. And yet they were the ones who noticed the light. Isn't that striking? The religious experts in Jerusalem had the Scriptures but missed the sign. Herod had power, but no vision. The Magi had curiosity, humility, and a willingness to follow where the light led. God's light often appears where we least expect it—and to people we least expect.

Isaiah proclaims, “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” The promise of God's light was never meant to stay confined to one people or one place. From the beginning, God intended this light for all nations. Epiphany reminds us: God is always reaching beyond our boundaries.

The story of the wisemen is more than a group of men traveling together. This is about them not simply admiring a star from afar but packing their belongings and leaving home and traveling a long and uncertain road. You see seeking God's light always involves movement.

The light of Christ is not meant to be observed like a museum piece. It is meant to be followed. And following means risk. It means change. It means leaving behind familiar paths.

We see this when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem. The star leads them into confusion before it leads them to clarity. They ask questions. They take wrong turns. They encounter resistance. That's important for us to hear. If you are seeking God's light and feel disoriented, you are not failing. If the journey feels unclear, you are not alone. God's light does not always eliminate the darkness immediately—but it keeps us moving through it.

We know the story so well that sometimes we forget the little bits of minutia that gives us more insight into the story. When the star finally stops it does not hover over a palace but it rests above a house and inside that house is not a throne but a child. Then these magi who have travelled a long way not knowing what or who they would find kneel before the child and offer him gifts.

In a way this is the great surprise of Epiphany. God's light leads them not to dominance but to humility. Not to the control of power but to love made vulnerable. When Herod heard about the star – the light – he is threatened by it because it exposes his fear and violence. These foreign travelers are transformed by the light because they allow it to change them.

So the question for us becomes, what does God's light reveal in us? What does it expose in us? Does it expose our need to control or to manipulate? Does it challenge our assumptions and prejudices? Does it invite us to lay down our fear, our anger, our grief or whatever is blocking the light from entering us.

There's a story about a rabbi who, after she lit the candles for Shabbat, moved her hand inward from the newly lit candles to her eyes. She explained, "We draw the light of God back into ourselves. Think about that for a moment. Whether we have a candle lit or not we should symbolically draw God's light back into ourselves whenever we can.

Matthew tells us that after worshipping the child, the Magi, "Left for their own country by another road." It's an easy line to overlook but it may be the most important verse in the story. When you encounter the light of Christ you cannot keep walking the same road. Epiphany is not just about revelation it is about transformation.

We may not have literal stars guiding us today, but we have the light of Christ shining through Scripture, through the Spirit, through acts of mercy, justice and love. And that light still calls us forward. To seek God's light is to be changed by it.

Isaiah's words still echo today, "Arise, shine, for your light has come." The light of Christ is not only something we follow it is something we are called to reflect. The world can be a place of deep darkness but God still chooses to shine through ordinary people who are willing to seek, to move, to kneel, and to go another way.

There is a Hanukah song whose lyrics are:

A row of burning candles Shines light upon your face Linking you and me and all of us  
To a far off holy place But the blazing of the candles Is not the only light. Look at all of  
us shining here tonight We are lights, lights of memory Remembering times long gone  
We are glowing, growing miracles We are lights, we are lights We are lights shining on  
and on

On this day when we proclaim and enjoy the light of God's glory in Jesus, let us, like the Magi, commit ourselves to being extremists to God's love, justice forgiveness, truth and mercy. Let us ask ourselves do we walk in the dark and in the shadows or do we walk in the light?

Like the Magi, we have the choice to journey toward the light or stay stuck wherever we are. Are we ready to travel home by a different road? The world around us is the same place it was before this Christmas journey—a world of war, injustice, anxiety, inequalities and fleeting power. And yet, to follow this child is to live a different way. The Way that Jesus walked is the way of hope and blessing and peace. We are called to serve this vulnerable love.

Do you want a better world in this year? If you do learn to live with patience, forgive mightily, fight injustice passionately, love extravagantly and most of all live with the joy of someone who knows Christ's love.

So on this Epiphany, may we be people who: notice the light when it appears; Follow it even when the road is unclear; Worship with humility; And leave changed, walking a new path because the light has come. And it is still shining. The star sent the magi on a journey to discover unexpected truths about God's love. Are we willing to make that journey too? Amen.