



Sunday, January 5, 2025  
Matthew 2:1-12 (Epiphany Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

For most of us the beginning of a new year tends to focus our attention on the future. For some of us that focus is expressed in our New Year's resolutions, the intentions we have for our life, and the plans we desire to make to move forward.

There are others of us who choose not to make formal resolutions, but we still have hopes and dreams for the coming year, and we consider all the possibilities of what the year ahead might have in store for us. And then there are some of us that just want a clean slate, a fresh start, a new beginning.

And in whatever ways this gets expressed or experienced it touches a longing or desire within us. We seek something we don't have. We want something different. We're fully aware of an absence. Something is missing from our lives. And by this I don't mean our life is defective or deficient, and I'm not being critical or judgmental. I'm merely pointing out the reality that there are times in our lives when we experience absence.

But here's the paradox. That absent thing – that missing piece – is also very present with us in and through our longing and desire for it. We may not see it or experience it, and it may not yet be fully realized in our lives, but nevertheless, it's there. It already exists within us. It's present in its very absence, and we experience that presence as longing, desire, and searching. I've often heard it described as happening when you know that you know but you don't know *how* you know that you know.

So, now that we're one week into the new year, let me ask you this. What resolutions have you made for this new year? What are your intentions or plans? What do your hopes and dreams focus on?

Maybe it's about your marriage, or a friendship. Maybe you want to strengthen your prayer life or deepen your faith. Maybe you want to be more generous or less judgmental. Maybe you want to stay instead of always running away. Maybe you want to get healthier, live more simply, or let go of your need for approval or perfection. Maybe you're longing to find and hear your own voice or desiring to live with greater integrity and authenticity. Maybe you're looking for peace, comfort, or hope.

Sometimes we don't know what it is that we're after. We only know that we're looking for *something*. Have you ever had that feeling that something was missing, and you didn't know *what*, but you knew you'd recognize it when you saw it?

And you're probably wondering what absence has to do with epiphany, because they sound mutually exclusive. But maybe it's not as simple as there's, either something there or there's nothing there. What if the experience of absence and the longings and desires that accompany it are the beginning of an epiphany for you? What if that sense of absence is the guiding star of your life by which God is revealing God's self to you? And what if your sense of longing and desire is really God's longing and desire for *you*?

Maybe epiphanies are the means by which God expresses God's longing and desire for each of us. Maybe they're God calling and guiding us into the presence of the divine. Maybe an epiphany isn't so much an "*Aha, I got it*" kind of moment as it is an "*Aha, it's got me*" kind of moment.

It's a moment that awakens us to the deep desires of our hearts, touches the longings of our life, and fills the absence in such a way that we get up and go, change our life, know ourselves in a new way, and travel along a different road.



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I really do believe that's what happened to the Magi, and I think it's what happens to us as well. That star in the night sky brilliantly blazed an absence for the Magi. It shined on them as a longing and desire. *They* thought they were seeking the Christ child. When in reality, it was the child seeking them.

Earlier this week I read a creative story by an imaginative sixth century poet and hymn writer named St. Romanos and in this story it talked of his hymn centered on the visit of the Magi in which we hear a conversation between Mary and Jesus. The Magi come to the door. Jesus tells Mary to let them in, that he brought them to the house by his word. His word was the light of the star shining on them. He tells Mary that he is in the Magi even as he is in her arms and that he came with them to the house though he never left Mary.

The star the Magi followed was the Word of God. They never traveled alone. All along, Jesus was with them and calling them to where he was – *to his house*. His word, his very presence – it appeared to their eyes as a star, to their minds as the courage to get up and go, and to their hearts as a longing and desire. The Magi experienced an absence that held the divine presence of Jesus within them.

I believe *that's* epiphany. And this guiding star is always there. It's not as if the star of God's presence shines for some but not others. It's there for everyone. It may be unseen, unrecognized, or unfollowed – but it's *always* there.

And I wonder if we often fail to recognize the epiphanies in our lives because they so often begin in absence. If we think nothing is there, then it makes sense to believe that we've misinterpreted the absence, and therefore we'll miss the epiphany. I don't want to do that, and I don't imagine you want to either.

So today I want us to begin with the absence. I don't want us to run away from it, deny it, or cover up. I want us to name the absence, and in doing so we "*observe his star at its rising*." What is absent from your life today? What are your deep longings and desires? What is the Word of God that you *need* to illumine your life?

Whatever you might name, *that* is the beginning of your epiphany. It's more than just emptiness. It's God calling. It's a guiding star that lights up your life. And it shines with God's longing and desire for you. It shines in the night sky of your life. It twinkles *presence* in the midst of *absence*. It's a beacon beckoning you home.

So, I invite you to trust the star. Follow it. Listen to it. Learn from it. Let it take you to the house where you will stand at the door with the Magi, and listen to the child tell his mother, "*Let them in. I brought them here.*"

In this season of Epiphany, we are invited to reflect not only on the joy of Christ's revelation to the Magi but also on the deep longing that preceded it. We live in a world where longing and absence are still very much present, where we often find ourselves searching for something we cannot yet fully grasp. Yet this longing is not a sign of abandonment, but a sign that God is at work in our lives, drawing us *always* toward himself.

Let us allow our longings to lead us to Jesus – to the place where absence and fulfillment meet. Let our longing for peace, for wholeness, and for the fullness of God's presence open our hearts to the reality that God has come to meet us in our waiting, in our searching, and in our longing. And in that moment, like the Magi, we will find that the star that has guided us all along has led us to the One who satisfies every longing of our hearts. Thanks be to God! Amen.