

Sermon: God's Journey with Us

Year B, Epiphany of the Lord

[Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12](#)

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I was shopping for a new cell phone cover this week. I just wanted a cheap boring one to replace the cheap boring ripped one I have now. The guy in the mall showed me the ones that would fit my phone. "You want a Yankees one?" I know my horror must have shown on my face. I mean, I know it's just a sports team, but my family would know that I was really serious about a guy if I brought him home and he was a Yankees fan. A Cubs fan they could handle. A fan of the English premier league soccer would be fine. But a Yankees fan — there just aren't Yankees fans in our tribe.

That was the most tribal thing I could think of in my life. Think about your tribe, whether that's your family or your circle of friends, the people you work with. To make it a tribe, there's usually some set of beliefs that you hold that lets you guys figure out who's on the inside and who's on the outside. You may not hate the people on the outside. We'd be perfectly civil to somebody in a Yankees cap, give them a jump if their battery had died, give them a push if they were stuck in the snow. We'd do exactly the same thing for them as we would for a stranger in a Red Sox cap, but it would be different.

Today, we are so used to thinking that Jesus came to save the whole world, to eliminate the tribe, to say we were all on the inside, that there was no more outside, that it's hard for us to catch the amazement that the people who heard Matthew's gospel had. They had their God, the God of Israel. Other peoples had other gods. Those other people were wrong of course. Those other people's god was not a real god, not *the* real god. But you figured out whose God was real by seeing what happened here on earth, who beat whom in war, who had the best harvest, who avoided the plague. What a change in thinking it must have required to have three wise men, three wealthy powerful men show up looking for the God of Israel. Forget about a god being born human. These strangers showed up looking for a God that was not their God. It wasn't like converting, they were still Yankees fans. They just wanted to play in Fenway too.

More than that, what does it say about the power of the God of Israel that God would appear, would connect with people who weren't from the tribe who worshipped that God? Those people who heard Matthew's gospel may have believed that they were following the true God and that there was only one God, but here was proof it was true. Their God was so powerful and so loving and so merciful that their God would call other people to travel to worship a baby in Israel. No wonder we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. God is here for all people and speaks to all people all the time.

Part of our journey together as a church is influenced by how we listen for God as God speaks to our hearts and how we put into words what we understand that Call to be. God's call to those wise men must have been incredibly compelling for them to leave everything they knew and travel to a powerful ruler's land to do something as wild as worshipping a baby as the embodiment of the all powerful God. And they did it together, which can't have been easy, because no matter how specific God is about the star or the baby or whatever, there's always a million details to work through. But they did it. And part of the skill that brought them to

Bethlehem and then home by another road had to be their ability to both hear God speaking, share what they had learned and listen to the others as they did the same.

I'd like to take the next 10 minutes or so to try something different. I'm going to break you into groups. I'm going to give you an envelope that has ten pictures in it. All the pictures in all the envelopes are different, there aren't any duplicates in the whole room. I'd like you to huddle together and go through them. There's also a piece of paper in there that has the start of sentence, "God is speaking to us through this picture and is saying ...". You need to complete the sentence.

Now, here's what will happen. None of you will believe it will work, but you're willing to humor me. I'm counting on that. Huddle up so you can see the pictures pretty well. Have someone flip through them once for the whole group taking maybe 5 seconds per image. Don't anyone say anything the first time through. I promise you there will be one or two that will speak to you. Maybe not really loudly, maybe you'll think, well I've always liked yellow. Then flip through them again. Just say outloud when there's one that speaks to you, and you'll find one or two that speak to the whole group. Put the rest back in the envelope. Discuss what speaks to you about them. If it speaks really clearly to one person, try not to let them dominate the conversation. There's a talking and listening that needs to happen. Someone will notice one detail, someone will notice another. Make sure you speak up. If there are people who are not speaking, invite them in, although they may decline. Work together to see if you can complete the sentence.

Once we're done, we'll form a prayer out of the sentences together with the pictures we've selected. Let me break you into groups. Just put up your hands if you have any questions.