

It's an Epiphany!

Matthew 2:1-12

It is a new year. With it usually comes a resolution or two. Most of us who make resolutions have bought into the “I’ll start on January 1st” syndrome. And I guess it makes a good enough benchmark if you want to easily remember when you started your new diet, etc. It’s also a great procrastination technique. Come up with a new resolution in July and convince yourself that it is okay to defer it to the first of the year.

Those things may work, I suppose, in the secular world. They don’t work with regard to God. Here’s what I mean by that. When we feel the need to change something, or add something, in our relationship with God, procrastination to some arbitrary date is not a good idea. *“God, it’s me. I really want to know more about you and come closer to you, so I’ve decided to study the Bible more frequently. I’ll start doing that the beginning of the New Year. See you then. Amen.”* At this point I imagine God holding out his hands and saying, “What! What!”

However, it just so happens that it is the start of a new year. We’re here, so we might as well get started. If you engaged any ideas for resolutions, did you also take your spiritual pulse? If you didn’t, it’s really not too late. You don’t have to wait 363 more days to do so. Our spiritual relationship with God is critically important. We can’t be Christians in name only. We have to be Christians in our hearts, yearning to come closer to our Lord. Methodism founder John Wesley called it the process of going on to perfection. It all starts with introspection, reflection, and an honest assessment of our relationship with God. Does our spiritual pulse beat fervently, or is it beating modestly, or do we have trouble even finding the pulse at all? And once that assessment has been honestly made, what do we do about it?

While we should never wait to do what we feel is necessary to deepen our walk with the Lord, the first two weeks of the year do provide us with a wonderful one-two guide for orienting our thoughts, implementing our desires, and stiffening our resolve to come closer to God. Today we have the story of the Magi coming to worship the baby Jesus and offering him precious gifts. Next week we will engage the story of Jesus’ baptism. Each will enable us to better align ourselves with the Lord.

The event of the Magi worshipping Jesus is called the Epiphany. The word means “manifestation of God.” What guidance, then, do we distill from the Magi as we seek the manifestation of God in our life?

- First, they were willing to follow the star wherever it led them. They came from far away into a land and among a people they did not know. Such takes trust and faith. In your discernment of how you can resolve to come closer to God, you must be willing to follow the Christ, no matter where he leads you. When you hear God’s call upon us, and respond, you have, by definition, come closer to him.

- Second, the Magi asked for help, inquiring where they could find the infant. While your journey of faith is personal, it is lived out in community. We need each other and we learn from each other. We ask each other for help on our journeys, including our spiritual journey.

- Third, the Magi brought their very best gifts to Jesus. In your quest for spiritual maturity, you must bring to God your most precious gift – yourself. Who you are as a person is your gift back to God. He created you and he wants you to be the very best you can be. How you live your life then is your best offering to God.

The good news is this – just as the Magi’s gifts were accepted by Mary and Joseph on behalf of the infant Jesus, so too all that we give to God is acceptable. May each of us in the coming year come before the Lord God every day offering ourselves. And in our quest to come closer to God, may we also have moments when we can say, “It’s an epiphany! I have directly known the presence of God in my life!” May the New Year truly bring to you the peace of Christ. Happy New Year. Amen? Amen!