

**January 7, 2018 – Epiphany Sunday**  
**“How God Gets My Attention”**  
**Rev. Dr. Scott Landis**  
**Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12**

As you may know, Epiphany is my favorite holiday of the entire church liturgical year. There are many reasons for that – I’ll spare you the details, but one is that this day, devoid of all the hype and pressure of the Christmas holiday, is a wonderful time to pause and reflect on where my life is – at present – AND where it might be going in the future. As the etymology of the word suggests, this day is about “showing forth,” “shining through,” “illumination,” “insight,” and “deeper understanding” about what is happening in my life and in the world in which I live, move, and have by being.

I realize for the Orthodox expression of Christendom, this is Christmas Day and holds a very different emphasis. Mimicking the example of the Magi, this day for the Orthodox community is about gift-giving. It is a feast day and cause for joyous celebration. But for most of us, today is a non-event, as we are referring to the previous holiday as “last Christmas” and for most of us decorations have already been neatly packed away for another season.

So, I invite you, once again, to re-enter this wonderful if not unbelievable story and let your imagination run free as we consider how it might speak to us today.

Yesterday, about 20 of us gathered for an Epiphany retreat – a day away for reflection to focus on this “deeper understanding” I mentioned earlier. I initially invited participants on the retreat to listen to the story to see which character they most closely identified with and to reflect on why that particular character seemed to grasp their attention and spoke to them at this time in their lives. You might wish to do the same - later. But for my meditation today, I’d like you to focus on the unique ways that God used to gain the attention of the various characters in this humorous if not provocative tale.

As I read the story, I notice at least 4 unique ways that God grabs the attention of those God seeks to communicate an important message:

For the “Wise Men” (sometimes referred to as “Magi” or astrologers) it was the **STAR**

For Herod – it was the **Wise Men themselves** (as well as his Chief Priests and Scribes) who refer to **SCRIPTURE**

Which is the third means – The Chief Priests and Scribes refer to the Hebrew Scriptures – specifically the book of Micah to further gain the attention of Herod.

And finally, as if the STAR was not enough, God speaks to the Wise Men through a **DREAM** – warning them not to return to Jerusalem, but to go home by another way.

To carry this all a bit further, you will remember in recent biblical stories God used both dreams and heavenly messengers known as angels to speak to the characters involved thereby guiding them on God's desire for their lives.

All this is to say that God is not limited by any means in getting the attention of those in the unfolding biblical drama – whether it be a phenomenon of nature – in this case a celestial body, or from the most unlikely person or persons – in this case astrologers. It can be from a more predictable source like Holy Scripture or sometimes even dreams – which are, in John Sanford's words, "God's forgotten language."

And if God was not limited by any means of getting the attention of those in the biblical story, I doubt whether God is limited in any way in getting ours today – attention that is. Which begs the obvious question – how might God be trying to get your attention today? And more importantly, are you willing to PAY attention? [PAUSE]

As you consider that, please know, I'm asking myself the same question. No judgment here.

I probably don't need to remind you we live in a very noisy world. I'm not referring solely to volume – although that is a huge factor. The other day, on my way to the church, I was behind a car whose radio was so loud, I noticed my rearview mirror vibrating! I wondered, what must be happening to his ears? And then, why? What was he trying to drown out? And that's just one example of the noise that surrounds us.

While the volume of our lives dampens the possibility of Divine intervention getting our attention – there is a magnitude of other stimuli with which we are constantly bombarded – most of which gets in the way. If it's not the "ping" of

a text, or email, it's a ringing phone. If not the phone, it's the radio or television. And think of the ubiquitous nature of social media through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter each of which pull us deeper into the battery-powered screens to which many of us are marginally if not fully addicted. Conversations, billboards, traffic, advertisements – the list is endless and all of which can hamper the possibility or God's ability to reach us.

OR – Maybe not!

Perhaps if God can use any means such as stars, astrologers, and dreams, maybe, just maybe, God can use any of these methods to speak to us by opening our minds – opening our hearts to new, deeper understanding.

What I am suggesting is that it is kind of unrealistic for us to think we can turn off all the noise, all the distractions. Oh, we can do that periodically. That's what retreats are for. For some, that's the purpose of vacations – to restore our humanity and give us the sense that we can reengage in the wear and tear of our lives.

But I want to suggest another approach. What if we opened ourselves to God's ability to speak to us through that which surrounds us daily. So, rather than bristling when we see and hear that annoying incoming phone call, we might consider – “how might I be conversing with God as I talk to another – one of God's children?” Or when that boatload of work comes our way that initially seems insurmountable we might reframe – “how might I see my gifts utilized in order to accomplish what is before me?” I think you get the picture.

God is constantly trying to get our attention. How might we carve out space – enough space to listen – to stars, to others, to scripture, to dreams – as well as a whole host of other means?

Remember, God is still speaking.

Amen