

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -2nd Sunday After Christmas - January 4, 2026

Good morning.

First of all, I apologize for what

appears to be a guffuffle as we today go through the service.

Pastor is sick.

I think he was sick during the end part of his vacation

and only got worse during the week.

So it seems that we need to do some work

on our communication skills so that the left hand knows

what the right hand is doing.

But we've done this before, so I'm

sure that we can do it again.

So we will follow along in the bulletin.

And with your help, I'm sure that we

will manage to have at least a meaningful service.

The Holy Gospel is from John, the first chapter,

beginning at the 10th verse.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.

And the word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him.

And without him, not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life.

And the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light
so that all might believe through him.

He himself was not the light, but he
came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him.

Yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people
did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God, who
were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man, but of God.

And the word became flesh and lived among us.

And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,

full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out,

this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me

ranks ahead of me because he was before me.

From his fullness, we have all received grace upon grace.

The law indeed was given through Moses.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God.

It is the only Son, himself God, who

is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The word of the Lord.

The Sermon

The sermon this Sunday was written by the Reverend Dr. Margaret

Bullitt Jonas, who is an Episcopal priest, author,

retreat leader, and climate activist.

Since this is the season of Epiphany following Christmas,

it seemed appropriate today to find a sermon that dealt

with the Magi and their journey.

The Reverend Margaret writes, when

I think of the three kings, what leaps to mind first

are the crushes I unpack every year, a couple of weeks

before Christmas.

On the piano in the living room, I
put the tall earthenware figures of Mary, Joseph,
and the baby, of the shepherds and the sheep,
and of course, the three kings and their camels.

On the mantelpiece goes a miniature nativity
set in which each teeny, tiny figure is made of clay,
delicately painted and no more than one inch high.

On the coffee table, I put the plastic figures
and the cheap wooden stable that the children can play with
to their hearts content without making their grandmother worry
that something will break.

No crush is complete without its three kings.

And when the 12 days of Christmas are over,
back go the kings and camels into their boxes
where they spend the rest of the year stored in the basement.

What would happen if the wise men walked out
of those crushes and into our lives?

What would happen if these figures actually came to life
for us?

What if their journey informed and deepened
our own spiritual search and propelled it forward?

There are four parts of the story that stand out.

First, of course, is the star, that mysterious shining
presence that startles the wise men and launches their search.

Ancient tradition held that an unusual star could appear
in the skies to mark the birth of someone special, such as a king.

And that is how the wise men interpret what they see.

Something out of the ordinary is taking place.

So out the door they go, leaving their ordinary lives
behind as they follow the light wherever it leads.

Every painting, movie, and Christmas card
that depicts the journey of the wise men
shows a dazzling star above their heads.

But we don't actually know from the biblical story
whether anyone but the wise men can see that star.

King Herod, the chief priests and scribes,
don't seem to know anything about the star
until the wise men arrive in Jerusalem
and tell them about its rising.

So the star may be visible to the eye,
or it may be perceptible only to one's inward sight.

It may be seen or it may be unseen.

Either way, it signals the birth of something new in the world.

It heralds a presence and a power just now being born.

And the wise men are wise because they spot the star
and set everything aside to see where it leads.

Maybe every spiritual journey begins with a star.

At some point, we get a sense, maybe a vague one,
that there's something more to life
than the ordinary round of tasks and responsibilities.

Something above, beyond, or maybe within material reality
that can give a larger meaning and purpose to our days.

So we set out on a quest to follow that star
and see where it leads.

We may name it in different ways.

Maybe we call it a search for meaning or wholeness,
a search for happiness or peace.

Maybe we seek to know that we are loved,
or even to draw closer to the divine source of love.

Deep down, we want to know God.

And so, like the wise men, we set out.

And what beckons us forward is a star,
a subtle, shining presence that keeps company with us
and that we follow as best we can.

For most of us, following the leadings of God

is not like having a GPS in the car delivering
clear-cut instructions.

The star of Bethlehem is more lucid than that.

So we have to develop a stance of careful listening
and open inquiry and a practice of prayer
that makes us more sensitive to the glimmers of holy.
It takes practice.

The second thing to come out of their story is Jerusalem.

Where does the star lead the wise men, straight to Jerusalem,
straight into the center of political and economic power?

Where King Herod the Great, a client king appointed by Rome,
rules with the same ferocity that Stalin wielded
over his own country in the 1930s.

And we may see glimmers of that now to the south of us.

We might wish that following the star
meant nothing more than developing
a personal practice of prayer or going away
on periodic retreats.

There are plenty of books and speakers out there
that define spirituality in a very individualistic way
as being mindful of your own mind
and cultivating your own soul.

And of course, that's part of the journey.

But right from the beginning, it's

clear that following his star also

means coming to grips with the social and political realities

of one's time being.

It has a civic dimension, a political dimension.

And as the wise men faithfully follow the star,

they are drawn straight into the darkness and turmoil

of the world, where systemic power can be used to dominate

and to terrify.

Without intending it or knowing it,

the wise men even contribute to Herod's program of terror.

And yet King Herod, too, trembles of news of the star.

It's rising, frightens him.

He's not sure what this means for him

and the power that he holds over the people of his country.

God's love is always a threat to those powers.

It opposes everything in us and around us

that is selfish, greedy, and motivated by the wish

to dominate, control, and possess.

The wise men needed to get to know these powers,

both within themselves and in the world around them,

if they were going to find and follow Christ.

So they entered Jerusalem and faced the darkness.

And then keeping their eyes on the star,

they kept going until it stopped over the place

where the child was.

And when they saw the star had stopped,

they were overwhelmed with joy.

The third part of the story is this encounter with Christ.

The long, long journey with all of its uncertainties

and privations, its cold nights and its restless ardent

searching has reached its fulfillment.

The star has stopped and the wise men can be at peace at last.

They have arrived.

They have found what they were looking for.

They enter the house.

They see Mary and the child.

And they fall to their knees in a gesture of deep reverence

and humility.

We glimpse such moments.

When we gaze at something that captures our complete attention,

maybe a stretch of mountains or the sea,

or when we take a long, loving look

into a child's sleeping face, or when we are completely transported by a piece of music.

In moments like these, it can feel as if we are gazing through the object on which we gaze and seeing into the heart of life itself.

And finally, the closing line of the story.

Having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The wise men refused to cooperate with Herod.

They deceived him.

They resisted him.

The wise men have been called the first conscientious objectors in the name of Christ.

They are the first in a long line of witnesses who from generation to generation have carried out acts of nonviolent civil disobedience in Jesus' name.

The journey of the wise men is our journey too.

For as Gregory the Great reportedly remarked in a homily back in the seventh century, having come to know Jesus, we are forbidden to return by the way we came.

So we set out together into a new year.

Let us keep the wise men at our side

rather than packing them away somewhere in a box.

Let us attune ourselves to the guiding of the star

and renew our commitment to prayer and inward listening.

And let us enter Jerusalem and all the dark places

of our world and soul, trusting that God's light will

shine in the darkness.

Amen.