

Sunday Sermon January 4, 2026

Star Word / Epiphany Sermon January 3-4, 2025
Rev. Coleen Tully+

When I was little, I think most of the girls in my Sunday school classes wanted to be Mary in the Christmas pageant. Not me. I wanted to be one of the Magi. I wanted to ride a camel through the desert, follow the star, and be one of the very first people to bring Jesus a present. You know, of course, it wasn't until my mom was directing the pageant that I was allowed to do that.

There was always something special about the wise men. And it wasn't just about trying to smoke an exploding rubber cigar, either. They were brave and adventurous and intelligent — seekers in the best sense of the word. And I was a seeker, too. I just didn't know what that meant when I was in third grade.

I'm far beyond third grade now, but I never outgrew being a seeker. I find there is something delicious about reading the same exact scripture I have read every three years and suddenly seeing it with completely new eyes, finding meaning I never understood before. Or walking or driving someplace I have been a hundred times and noticing something that has always been there, but now seems to speak to me in a way that touches my heart—and wondering how I could have missed that.

It turns out I have not had the opportunity to ride a camel across a desert, but I have ridden one. I have had the experience of seeing Jesus with fresh new eyes and a restored spirit after having lost my way. And I have felt, at those times, as though I was bringing him a precious gift—that gift being me, with my faith restored.

There is an old saying that "Curiosity is the star that lights the way to discovery." And I think curiosity is what drives us seekers. I am guessing you are curious about the star word in the envelopes you have. I know I'm curious about what my word might be. I sure hope I like it. Because, honestly, I don't always know what to do with my star word at first. Sometimes it feels obvious, and sometimes it feels confusing—or even a little, or a lot, annoying.

There are words I've wanted to trade in for something that might seem clearer or easier. I'll never forget the year I got the word "submit," or the year I got the word "triumph." But when I've stayed with the words, when I've kept an open mind, when I've stayed curious, they've had a way of showing up at just the right moment—or in just the right way—asking something of me or showing something to me that I didn't even know I needed to learn. And so I've come to treasure this practice.

Don't you wonder if the Magi had some idea, or at least some hopes, about what the star was leading them to? I think they must have. When the star stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. And here, after this long, hard journey, they end up at a simple home in Bethlehem, where they find a carpenter, his wife, and a child. There are no treasures in the house—no purple robes, no gold rings, no crowns—nothing to show that they are in the presence of someone destined to be a great king. Only the star overhead indicates that anything special is going on.

I can't imagine what went through their heads. Was it shock? Disappointment? Fear? Sadness? Anger? It seems like they had to expect something more than this. Whatever went through their heads, it stayed there. Because what they did was kneel down, pay him homage, and offer gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh before leaving for their own country by another road.

Once we know our word, we may find ourselves waiting for something big, too—something dramatic, with clarity and certainty and maybe even some bells and whistles. The Epiphany story reminds us that God often comes quietly. What the Magi received wasn't what they expected, but it did draw them closer to Christ. I don't know what your word will reveal to you this year. I don't even know what mine will ask of me. But my hope is that, like the star, it will offer just enough light to keep us moving—enough light to help us recognize Christ when we meet him, sometimes in places we didn't think to look, which often may be within ourselves. Thanks be to God.