

Today is the Sunday the church calls Epiphany.

An epiphany is an experience of seeing something new
or a sudden new understanding.

As a part of the church year,

Epiphany is when the wise men follow this big star - this big light.

There may have been widespread excitement – people talking.

Herod decides to bring in some specialists to help locate this child.

They were astrologers from the east – Persia, perhaps Iran – also priestly types.

They represent another culture, people who look at things differently
people who are willing to follow a vision, so to speak.

Perhaps they represent a people more apt to follow things they can't quite see yet -
but perhaps see in the stars.

We know they paid attention to the stars.

I am told that in 7 BC

Jupiter and Saturn appeared very close together in the night sky.

They cast a glow similar to that of a single large star.

The next year Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were closely aligned.

Some scholars believe one of these two events produced the bright light
the Magi followed when they went to Bethlehem.

Hundreds of thousands of people lived in that part of the world at that time in history.

Think how many would have seen such a light.

And, it did not lead them anywhere?

Our magi, these men history calls "wise,"

may have been lead by a bigger idea – a bigger vision.

I want to talk about vision today, and ask you,

"How can this story of the Magi can give us something today?"

What did they see that most people did not see?

After all, they were called "wise." They had a different way of looking at things.

It was out of their eastern traditions that came the mystery schools
that were the target of Christians for the next several hundred years.

And yet - here they are in the birth story.

There must be something to this kind of seeing, this kind of vision following.

Looking Farther Than You Can See – based on Matthew 2: 1-12
Aspen Community UMC
January 6, 2008

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A young family was driving through Kansas on vacation.
Five-year-old Tyler was looking out the car window.
"Boy," he said, "it's so flat out there, you can look farther than you can see."
You can look farther than you can see.
Now there is a way to think about vision.
We all need to look farther than we can see.
Churches need a vision for what they want to be in a community.
People need a vision for who they want be or to grow into.
The world needs vision.

If we are a critic of the war in Iraq, we search for a vision of how to extricate
ourselves honorably from the conflict.
If we are supportive of the war in Iraq, we long for a vision of how
we might accomplish the ends our nation had in mind
and come home leaving a safer country for its inhabitants.
In whatever ways we individually consider the war –
we all want to see something else.
Am I right about that?

It does not have to be world conflict.
It can be conflict in our own homes and families, or with co-workers or acquaintances.
We may long for a different way to relate to people,
and we picture what we want it to look like. It takes vision to change things.
It takes looking farther than you can see.

All of us look at the challenge of terrorism
and we long for a vision of our world without
what seems to be a deadly disease, of suicide bombers
and persons who set out to kill
because of hate and distrust – and seemingly nothing better to do.

Scientists and others look at troubling signs of global warming
and encourage do things or don't do things to stave off potential crisis.

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Visioning the potential crisis seems important in moving into something new.

We need to look farther than we can see.

We look at our candidates for President and listen to see if they can cast a vision
of the future of our nation, and our own futures.

I found myself listening the other night
as the winners and those coming up 2nd and 3rd of the Iowa caucus spoke
to us and to their supporters, their campaign staff who have
virtually set their lives aside for the duration of the campaign.

I have been there, and I know the thrill and the heartache.

Those campaign staff, paid and volunteer,
who work almost 24 hours a day – have signed on to that candidate's vision.

You know why I like political campaigns?

Because, when you work on a campaign, you have caught a vision,
an honorable vision, and it's usually a shared vision,
or you would not be there.

And, if the vision is not there, neither the candidate nor the supporters will last very long.

There has to be a vision.

You have to look farther than you can see.

You know, a lot of the time, if not most of the time,
as we go about our lives, and our work, and our recreation,
we're thinking day to day
and we forget about, or don't really have a vision
of where we want to go – or who we want to be.

Many of us need new vision for our lives – a bigger vision.

Sometimes we get bogged down in seas of guilt or regret.

Sometimes we feel something is missing from our lives.

If only we could see something that we haven't seen before.

Maybe we had a vision back there a long time ago,
and life got in the way.

What is the saying?

Life is what happens when you are busy making plans – something like that.

Samuel Mockbee is an architecture professor at Auburn University.
He had a vision and a dream that poor people could have great houses.

He is the visionary behind an architecture firm that builds
functional, low-cost and I am told lovely homes and public buildings for the poor in Alabama.

They turn scrap cardboard, old car parts, used tires,
and other cast-offs into real homes.

Some have been featured in architectural magazines.

This is about vision – what was refuse can become beautiful and lasting and valuable.¹

The difference is vision. What potentials do you see?

Is there anything in your life that may look like trash
that with a little vision – may turn out to be a way to something new?

Experiences – not stuff around the house -
you know, those things that lay around that you say
"I might use that someday." Not those things.

It is the things like past failures, or past accolades, past things
that just need to be transformed by a new vision.
It may be past successes. Successes are just as challenging as failures
when it comes to learning to envision in a realistic manner.

Not daydreaming but putting details into your visions
and plans in your details.

There is a contemporary Christian music group called MercyMe.

They have a song out called "I Can Only Imagine."

"I can only image what it will be like" "what my eyes will see when your face is before me."

It's about imagining what it is like to be in the presence of God.

I believe we are always in the presence of God.

And it is the presence of God, the divine presence, the divine energy –
call it what you may -

that makes for transformation.

It takes imagining it first – seeing it as the first of several concrete steps.

And maybe for you and me it takes some re-imagining every year at this time
when we are thinking bigger – big stars, big light -
big things happening – when the divine touches earth in a big way.

We really want to do it all the time.

The child in the car on vacation looking out over Kansas says
"I can look farther than I can see."

The world needs people who can look farther than they can see.
Can you look farther than you can see? Can you be one of them?
Can you see what you want to create this year,
or what you want to re-create that has gotten damaged, out of shape in your own life?

Remember the Magi – following that bright light.

Think of the light of your own life

and the places the divine would like to lead you.

Spend some time visioning it and putting in the details.

Then follow the star.

¹ <http://archive.salon.com/people/conv/2001/08/09/mockbee/>