

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
18 January 2026
Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

“Star Stuff”

*The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood,
the carbon in our apple pies – all come from the interiors of collapsing stars.*

So explains astronomer Carl Sagan in his series, *Cosmos* – a secular lyric of things writ large, a luminous perspective about our very nature and being – that each of us is a living vessel, a mortal temple of divine matter.

Human we are, yes – but, as Sagan says, we are also the stuff of stars.

What resonant language and imagery for a season which opens with a narrative about a star, a story of faithful pilgrims guided into a dazzling discovery – that hope is born in the most unexpected, and even seemingly unfitting places, that the holy is made manifest in human life, even within our own human life, and that it can be shared throughout the word by human choices and action. Such is one message of Epiphany.

Now, I will confess that I have never been particularly enamored with the season of Epiphany. I’m not entirely sure why, but it hasn’t gotten the very best of my attention over the years, and I am a bit embarrassed to acknowledge that. I suppose I am so captivated with all that is Advent and Christmas, so compelled by the passage of Lent, and so utterly given to the exquisite mysteries of Holy Week, that the gift and lessons of Epiphany have always seemed less compelling somehow.

But I will also say that I find that to be changing this year. My spirit is wrapping herself around Epiphany in a way like never before. Much of that has been unfolding in our Wednesday noon Eucharists here at Trinity – in quiet meditations we share before passing around a small basket of bread in a simple Communion service.

Those weekly meditations always reflect the themes of the current season, and so, in Epiphany, we are focusing on how the manifestation of the Christ is revealed to the wider world by the ways in which the Christ is manifest in *us*. Like those desert travelers who open the season with an iconic story of following a star, we have been exploring images and metaphors for our own pathways and journeys in this life.

This is not self-indulgent spiritual goop. It is not at all about *getting* our own way – it is about *finding* our own way – so that we will live more fully and faithfully into *the Way*.

In today’s Gospel, I believe we find Jesus in just such a place. We are still lingering in the account of his baptism, where John recognizes him as the Messiah, and urges his own disciples to let go of him and now choose to follow Jesus, wherever the road leads.

It has been said that in Epiphany, we see the ministry of Jesus “hit the streets” – it is officially on the move—as he takes the first steps from perceiving his divine call to living into his mission. He begins gathering disciples to journey with him onto new and unexpected holy ground, calling them forth with simple words of invitation – *Follow me*.

Epiphany is a season to ponder how *we* respond to that same invitation in our own day.

We may well wonder what is down that road – whether we *will* follow, what we will find there, and whether it is worth the cost – personally, politically, and spiritually. When asked that same question by other prospective companions, the first disciples answered with simple words of their own, which resonate even in our own day: *Come and see*.

Come and see the Christ in the compassionate offering of food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and childcare to those in need. *Come and see* the integrity of public servants who honor their oaths of office, employees of every kind honestly doing their work, educators as unsung heroes, scientists as pioneer champions, artists, musicians, and writers pointing to larger truth and our better nature. *Come and see* the Christ in those who put their lives on the line to protect us, those who take the risk to speak truth to corruption, stand firmly for the rule of law, rage against injustice, and fervently pray for peace, close to home and far away.

Come and see that all of this is holy ground – that there are as many ways to manifest the Christ in this world as there are good souls willing to walk his Way.

With that, my Epiphany prayer is that each of us will, indeed, *Come and see*, that we are called to follow and manifest the Christ from the holy ground of our own lives. And that prayer is prompted by a blessing recently shared in our Wednesday noon gathering. It is from a piece by Jan Richardson, called, *The Map You Make Yourself*:

*You have looked at so many doors with longing,
wondering if your life lay on the other side.
For today, choose the door that opens to the inside.
Travel the most ancient way of all:
the path that leads to the center of your life.
No map but the one you make yourself.
No provision but what you already carry
and the grace that comes to those who walk the pilgrim way.
Pray for protection. Ask for the guidance you need.
Offer gladness for the gifts that come, and then...let them go.
And do not expect to return by the same road. Home is always by another way...
and you will know it not by the light that waits for you
but by the star that blazes inside you, telling you that where you are is holy.*

And so, my friends, inspired by the stuff of stars (the Spirit of God) and guided by the divine map (the Way of Love) may we come to *love* the Epiphany season...and *live* the Epiphany season...in *every* season of our lives...for the sake of *all* lives.

Amen.