



Ravensworth

BAPTIST CHURCH

Sunday, January 2, 2022

Epiphany, observed

Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis

Arise! Shine!

Since my family has mostly been at home the last two weeks, we watched a lot of movies. One delightful film that I think we've now watched three times is the new movie on Disney+—*Encanto*. Did any of you watch it recently? It's all of the beauty of magical realism on display in film. Plus, written and produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Writer Rafael Motomayor summarizes it like this: "The film is set in the remote jungles of Colombia in a small Macondo-like town, where the Madrigal family has founded a sanctuary after escaping violence 50 years earlier. Now, each member of the family is born with a gift that helps protect the family and help the community, whether it's super strength, the ability to control the weather, magical healing, and more. These gifts also have the added benefit of making the Madrigal family the elite of the town, as their magic seems to be keeping the whole community afloat—though certainly not on equal grounds, what with the huge estate at the top of a hill overlooking the town like the Madrigals were royalty.

At the center of the film is Mirabel (Stephanie Beatriz), the only Madrigal without any powers, who seems to be at the center of a threat to the family's magic. Hellbent on being accepted by the super-family that is constantly leaving her aside, Mirabel sets out to save the family from their doom, though she may find that the cracks in the foundation started long before they became visible."¹

Encanto is about knowing your gifts and living into it without letting that gift crush you. It's about wondering what gift you offer to others and still not letting that gift define you. It's about recognizing when the powers that be seek to stifle or control your gift in such a way that you cannot flourish.

Following the star might be a reminder to follow the one who bestows gifts and to not let the powers that be overwhelm it. Epiphany is the feast day where we remember the magi, traveling to Jesus with yes, physical gifts, but with the gift of their calling ever before them. They were following the star toward liberation. Arise, shine! Your Lord has come, perhaps they heard in the distance.

¹ Rafael Motomayor, "[Encanto is Best When it Forgets to be a Disney Movie](#)." Observer, 11/24/21.

This will be our fifth year to pick star words on the Sunday we observe Epiphany. This centering activity called Star words is practiced all over the place in different churches and denominations. Given this is the day we celebrate the magi following a star, which guided their path to Jesus and then also home, by another way, we're going to join in the star-following journey.

On Epiphany last year, we picked star words, and how could we have predicted how 2021 would unfold? I'd love to hear from a few folks about what your star word was for last year and any brief reflections you might have—

(Congregation shared reflections)

My word for the last year—was pursue. I remember that I told Kay Tarazi that the idea of pursuing anything made me exhausted and that was at the beginning of the year when vaccines were just rolling out and I was in the midst of a schoolyear with a kindergartener and second grader at home. But then, I let “pursue” rumble around in me for a few months and alongside some new movement practices, pursue because about me making choices that helped me be, surprise, be less exhausted. This year I pulled, “celebrate” as my star word.

As you look at your word this morning, you might roll your eyes at it today or think it's a good match or have no reaction at all to it. This won't necessarily be your theme for 2022, but if this word is at the forefront of your mind, what might you notice about our world, your relationships, your work, your relationship with God?

Or, could just looking at your word in your car, at your desk, or on your refrigerator remind you that you are on a journey of hope and that you are loved? Might a glance in the direction of this star word, cause you to pause, take a deep breath, and give thanks for something? There are so many paths this journey could take us over the next year.

As we contemplate our star words, remember, it is for the whole year. This time next year, we'll hear from a few people about what you've learned from the star word and if we enjoy this experience, we'll pick new ones again next year. This is one of my favorite Sundays each year.

Arise and shine! Epiphany means that there is a shift, a journey that happens—from what was to whatever will be, that newness where God calls. May you expectantly and faithfully look to the life of Jesus as you live out your gifts and callings.

Communion

The star we follow leads us back to this table this morning, the table of love and goodness, the table of liberation, and the table of remembrance. You're invited to partake with elements from home—whatever those might be this morning.

As we look and listen to the faces and voices among us this morning, we have a small vision of what the kingdom of God is like and how we live into it. We look and see the gifts of many, the gifts that don't define us, and yet call us forward.

And we remember, when Jesus took the bread and he broke it, giving thanks for it, he said, "This is my body, broken for you. Take, eat, and remember me." And then he said, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink it all of you, and remember me."

Because when we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim Christ's death and resurrection until he comes again. This table is one of love and liberation, where gifts are celebrated and remembered. It's a place where goodness is found in abundance, and hope is made new.

On this Epiphany, may it be ever true. Thanks be to God. Amen.