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St. Mary's Newton

The Feast of the Epiphany Year A

4 January 2026

Today, or rather every January 6, we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany.

The feast itself revolves around the magi letting something outside of themselves--
a star-- guide them -- literally, to Bethlehem, metaphorically, towards God.
in a courageous, wondrous journey.

Most people, both then and now,
are not going to drop everything and take a journey
to we don't know where to do
we don't know what.

The good news is, we don't always have to, which is what star words are built upon.

The idea is we don't look through them and pick the one we want
but keep whichever one we randomly choose.

Through a slight mishap, Andy got two words “singing” and “charity.”

They both seemed painfully obvious.

Andy had been out of work for a long time,
and asked for and received help in terms of expertise,
and connections, in addition to financial aid.

He and his family moved to West Virginia in October

and suddenly he has an income much larger than most of the folks where he lives.

On one of his first days, He gave a 20 to someone asking for it once recently.

She received it excitedly, happily, while Andy told her not to give up
and that God loves us all.

He reflected on how exciting it can feel
and also how it also doesn't change the situation.

Andy also spent time pondering the balance
between self forgiveness and taking responsibility
for what we have done and left undone.

Andy also received singing.

Some of Andy's earliest memories include singing.

He didn't join St. Mary's choir right away;

different medications had led to some difficult changes.

And yet as most of you know Andy did join the choir here

And has now joined choirs in his new hometown.

As in years past, Ariel keeps his Star Word clipped to a large, 2'x3', 12 month wall calendar in front of and above his work desk monitors.

Each morning, Ariel meditates and prays with a spreadsheet, using prompts.

Last year, he started incorporating a star word.

To this daily process, he added his 2025 Star Word:

Serenity, something he's been looking for all his life.

On this spreadsheet, each day comes up with responses

on how God has moved through, around, or in connection with that word for him.

For Ariel, now that his brain is now subconsciously looking for

how God has expressed/is expressing himself through "Serenity",

Not everyone gets a star word that they want, like, or initially understand.

One of us got the word "inspiration."

Inspiration seemed a little trite and disappointing, but they gave it a go.

The person somewhat begrudgingly put it on the console of their car.

2025 ended up being a challenging year for lots of reasons.

You need to know how many people have said that to me.

What started out as trite became a familiar friend,

leading its owner to compose a prayer

"Dear God, Inspire Me! Help me to put one foot in front of the other, 1 day at a time,

& show up with all I may have to offer.

This is a fresh day, fresh start, fresh inspiration.

Give me strength, courage and bravery to face this day."

Marisa got the word “mercy.”

When faced with a world that seems increasingly merciless,
particularly towards those who might need mercy the most,
Mercy seemed not just disappointing, but categorically unhelpful.

She decided to try, and just put it in her phone case.

Instead of trying to fake mercy,
she looked for mercy in the wild.

And by God if she didn’t start seeing it,

W/ one of the initial times being during The Rt. Rev. Marianne Budde’s sermon in January,
when she pleaded with President Trump to have mercy on
Folks who were and are scared

Families with LBGTQIA+ children and members,
Immigrants, children with parents as immigrants.

Both of these star words demonstrate how keeping a word
that seems unhelpful at best, mean or cruel at worst,
may sometimes be the word we need.

So today we are all getting a star word if you want.

Star words are more of an intention to consider a particular aspect
of our spiritual journeys that the divine might be inviting us into a new way.

Put your word somewhere you’ll see it often –
wallet, bathroom mirror, lockscreen, phone case
wall at work, car console, large wall calendar–
and just see what happens.

They are more an invitation to observe and notice than anything else. No one has to.

Anyone may. My only caveat is this:

If anyone notices it is making them feel guilt or shame, just recycle it.

It’s meant to be an invitation, not yet another way to beat ourselves up
or yet another thing to do, so if that’s happening to you,
get rid of it.

The magi symbolize one of Matthew's themes,
which is extending the invitation of God to more folks.
Star wars are a riff on that, in that they ask us to wonder
about the divine in various areas of our life.
Where might God be guiding us now?

Announcements

Star words

Focus groups

Intro to Matthew first one tomorrow at noon on Zoom

Annual meeting in three weeks