



## St. Michael's Church

CHARLESTON, SC

EPIPHANY  
VISION CASTING

SUNDAY, JANUARY 6, 2019

MATTHEW 2:1-12

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

This is one of the saddest and hardest weeks of the year, the week that “with tears” we all say goodbye to our beloved Christmas Trees. I grew up in a house where the Christmas Tree **promptly** went up on Christmas Eve, and **promptly** came down after the 12 Days of Christmas ended on January 5.

My wife grew up as, dare I say, a Methodist, where pagan heresies led their family to believe that it was bad luck to keep the tree up past New Year's Eve. No, the right Anglican way is to bring the tree down on what we celebrate today - The Great Epiphany. That day where the wisemen were led by the star to the manger. Which leads to this question, what do or did you have on top of your tree? A star? Or an angel? Both are Biblical.

The star goes right back to Matthew 2, where God uses a star in the sky to lead three men to the birthplace of Jesus. These three men were part of a larger group called scientists of the sky or scientists of the stars. Known as Magi, these Wisemen came from the areas of Persia and Arabia, and dedicated their lives to comparing the skies and constellations to the prophetic literature of the day, including all the prophecies of the Old Testament.

They looked to the skies to answer the prophetic statements of Scripture. They knew for instance the passage in the Old Testament book of Numbers where Moses writes,

*I see him, but not here and now;*

*I perceive him; but far in the distant future*

*A star will rise from Jacob, a scepter will emerge from Israel.*

Three of the Wisemen have that Epiphany and say, there it is, there is the star! Not only do they identify the star, they follow it to the one man who would change the world!

*Star of Wonder! Star of Night!  
Star of Royal-Beauty Bright!  
Westward Leading, Still Proceeding  
Guide us to thy perfect light!*

This star broke through the galaxies to remind us that God is still in charge, and loves us so much He's sending His son Jesus to save the world and redeem us from sin. That's the Epiphany: the day and time God breaks through to reveal himself!

The Epiphany tells us that God loves you and me so much He desires and is able to break into our lives at any time, on any day, through whatever means He chooses. I don't want us to get stuck on astrology. The bigger meaning is that God will use any means possible to lead us to Himself.

That North star may not always be in the sky as it was for the wise men. It might come in the form of a still small voice, like it did for Elijah. It may come in the form of a heart being strangely warmed, like it did for Wesley. It might come in the form of hearing from another, as it did for Mary. That North Star might come in the form of dreams, as it did for Jacob. That North Star might come through a group meeting, where all of a sudden there is joy-filled consensus, as it did for the Disciples in that upper room!

God breaks in, to lead entire civilizations, large groups, small groups, and individuals. Epiphany! The day we are reminded to expect the in-breaking, and the intervention of God!

One of the things that frustrates me about myself is that I can go months in my daily prayer and Bible study, not always kind of coming up for air to say, "Lord, Break in. Invade the totality of my life." I've found that studying the word is not always the same as invoking the author of the Word!

Maybe you resonate with this? How many of us expect to hear and see God tangibly break into our lives to speak to us? How many times do we, like the Magi, get quiet, look up and say, "God break in. Let me see you shine Lord. Give me the wisdom I do not have." Are you walking with your eyes focused? Ears opened? Hands up? Yes or no, this message is for all of us and our collective life together as a church family.

So, here we are in the first week of 2019. New Year is the right time to carve out time and say Lord, Where are you leading me in the new year? Where is your North Star in my life? Where did I see you work last year? Where you do want to intervene and take over? What are your course corrections for my life?

Individually, and like the wisemen, we all need that North Star. Setting goals, not just to lose weight, or eat less chocolate, but goals most importantly to gain the mind of Christ for holiness. Communally, and like the wisemen, churches need that north star as well.

We as the Church Family of St. Michael's need to be united in following that North Star. Over the last six months, we as your vestry leadership team have been seeking the Lord, because we are not willing to be side-tracked by any national distractions. Praise God the North Star has is shining brightly in your vestry. Jesus has been leading us to one word in particular, and that word is Engagement. It keeps coming up at every Vestry meeting. Engagement has become our North Star. How are we engaging you in ministry? How are you engaging the church? Specifically, are we creating engaged disciples?

Yesterday our Discipleship team brought Adele Calhoun here to give a talk on Discipleship. Adele defined discipleship in three words: Hand-Over or Surrender. Another defined an engaged disciple this way: Someone who has moved from being the recipient of the church's mission to one being responsible for the church's mission. Let me say that again. An engaged Disciple is someone who has moved from being the recipient of the church's mission to one responsible for the church's mission.

That's our star.. We believe that's what God is saying to St. Michael's Church. Engagement. Where we inherently know that what I bring to the table of the church is important. I have stock in the mission of St. Michael's. My life matters here. I'm needed here. My gifts matter. And yes, I have a teachable spirit!

That's the heart of the engaged! Moving from recipient to one responsible for the church's mission. How? Vision 2019.

I want to give you three vehicles of engagement that the vestry and staff have been working on. The first is this: last summer, the vestry set up a series of task forces to strengthen the church and be that place where you can live out your gifts in the church. Task forces were created for Worship, Congregational care, Discipleship, Strategic Planning, Evangelism, Mission, and several more. These task forces are not places you serve for life, but, using your gifts, serve on specific projects to move the church forward in depth and creativity. You love hospitality? Serve on that task force! Evangelism? Serve on it! These task forces are still under development. So we're not asking you to join one today as much as to ask you to pray, "Lord, as you led the wisemen, to which of those task forces might you be leading me? Help me move from recipient to one humbly responsible for the church's mission."

Second Vehicle of engagement: Simple Sunday School.

The vestry has been working with the staff to re-institute a robust place of Biblical teaching. Engagement through clear Bible Teaching in Sunday School is essential in a culture of Biblical illiteracy, and a culture where the winds of change are blowing hard. Scripture is that critical anchor to help us know the heart and mind of Jesus to keep us rooted. It's why we have Gospel Project Every Sunday for all ages, where every age studies the same Scriptures that you hear it from the pulpit. We even give you devotionals for the week to carry on the readings. And, as I've said before, we will be doing this until I retire!

As your shepherd, I want to walk by Sunday School classrooms that are full every Sunday, with everyone from babies to our eldest. The north stars of engaging through worship and engaging through Sunday School belong in our lives as non-negotiables.

Our North Stars of Engagement:

1. Task Forces
2. Sunday School

The third vehicle of engagement is a bit messier. We desire that every person in this church be engaged in a life group or small group, where you're doing life together with 8 or 10 others. These groups are the living room of the church. Without a smaller group, you may never feel connected here. Your life or small group is the place we work out our discipleship, where we practice handing over our lives, surrendering in the context of Bible Application, and even going on mission together. For my wife and me, our life group is an indispensable part of our lives, engaging us with others for support, correction, and direction! If you aren't in a life or small group, use that connect card to tell us you want to be in a one!

Now, a quick disclaimer. Some of you have told me that the last thing you will ever do is join a life group. I'm not a life groups gal. Not a small group guy. It will never happen. I've been ordained now for over 20 years and one of the many things I've learned is that I cannot genetically re-engineer you! So, this is why we have Super Wednesdays. Super Wednesday starts back this week, offering you places to engage in topical discipleship courses that have more of a beginning and an end. You can engage in courses like The Art of Marriage Course, Bible Studies, or studying the writings of C-S Lewis.

So the North Star of Engagement:

- Engagement through a task force
- Engagement through Sunday School
- Engagement through Life Groups and or Super Wednesday.  
All leading to a natural place of mission!

My friends, that's our North Star. If you're wondering what our priorities are, where are we headed as a church, that's it!

Back to the wisemen, what happened when they followed the star? They experienced the highest joy they had ever known. The Bible says they were over-joyed! They bowed down to worship Jesus and fell in love with the Savior. The result of following the North Star? We fall in love with Jesus all over again! Engagement:

- Task force
- Sunday School
- Life Group and or Super Wednesday.

Finally this morning, as I have done nearly every year for the last 12 years, this past week I went to my covenant group. My covenant group is a group of Priests who are all Rectors of churches from around the country. We meet for a three fold purpose:

- Review where we have seen God at work in our lives, families and churches
- Where we Sense God leading us
- And to pray for one another and be accountable to each other.

The way this works is that each of us gets one hour to “log-in” and share where we have, in a sense, seen the star. And nobody can interrupt. It’s a place where we clergy are listened to. After the log in, we might receive advice, encouragement, and even correction, but we always pray for each other

It’s a magnificent annual blessing in my life with some of the most gifted leaders in the church today. Well, we wrapped up just two days ago with a Rector from a Church in Philadelphia who, during his log-in, told the horribly tragic story of losing his 23-year-old daughter to suicide this year. As a covenant group, we of course had been tracking with him, and knew about it. But what we didn’t know until just two days ago was that Richard preached at his own daughter’s funeral. As priests, we’ve all preached at funerals for the families of others, but preaching your own daughter’s funeral in your own church, I can’t imagine. Then, during his log in, and much to our surprise, Richard played the entire video of the sermon he preached.

You’ve never seen so many Rectors cry in one place. It was a gut wrenching sermon, but there was one line that especially hit me, a line for all of us today. Richard quoted Pastor Rick Warren, whose son also died by suicide, saying, “In God’s garden of grace, even broken trees bear fruit. And we are all broken. God uses broken people.”

My point, Richard’s point, and Rick Warren’s point is that Jesus is never done with us. And we are never done in our deeper need and search for Jesus. We have something to offer. You might be here this morning in a broken place, feeling as if you have nothing to give. You might be saying I don’t have gifts to engage in the church. I’m not sure I can enter a life group with others. I don’t know if I’m there yet. You might even be saying, I’m no Eunice Logan! I’m no Jason Moore! My beloved friends, you are chosen. God doesn’t choose the qualified. God qualifies those whom He chooses, and you are chosen!

So my friends, engage like you’ve never engaged before, as together we follow the North Star, as a family of God doing His will to transform hearts through Jesus Christ!