



## **Sermons** **from Northwood United Church**

**“Star Gazing.”**

**Matthew 2:1-12**

**Will Sparks**

**January 8, 2012**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Have you read your horoscope for this year? No? There's a lot to learn there you know. And at this early stage in the new year in which everyone is making predictions about economics and politics and pop culture icons for the coming year, that would be a place to look for predictions.

“My social status and career is once again on a rising path. I'll be assisted by luck throughout the year. Finances, however, may remain low. There can be reasons for little financial worries, especially after May 2012. 2012 is not the right time to consider change in career. On the domestic frontier, I am supposed to avoid direct confrontation with my loved ones because my dominating nature may cause trouble in family matters.” I'm a Leo and my dominating nature gets me in trouble sometimes.

According to other astrological authorities, Kate Middleton will become pregnant in 2012, Ryan Gosling, the popular Canadian actor will reach new heights this year, and Stephen Harper will have a change of heart and increase Arts funding to 1970 levels.

Now you may be thinking, “Oh dear. He's off his rocker quoting horoscopes alongside the gospel!” Since when do astrological charts have anything to do with the gospel. Well actually, since the telling of the gospel of Matthew. Those wise guys? They were called wise because they are astrologers, They wrote the book on horoscopes. No, they were not predicting a surge in personal and sexual power for Hollywood celebrities, but they did predict the birth of a significant figure to the Jews and by gum, they were right! They even found the birth place by following the charts and the stars. And the folks who wrote Matthew's gospel figured that story was pretty neat. Worth noting in what became known as the inspired Word of God! Oh dear.

Well, I am no follower of astrologer's predictions, but I love the story of these wise ones. Oh, not because they got the star reading right. I have no idea about that. It was everything else in the story that I love, and I think these star gazers have way more to teach us than how to read the stars. I believe that if we look at what they did in response to the birth of Jesus, and try to emulate their response to this amazing birth, well then I believe that we will have something way better than stargazing and predictions to carry us into the new year.

First of all, when confronted with the news, they showed up. They didn't just dash off an email of congratulations to the people of Israel on the birth of their new savior. They didn't send off their gift by Canada post or go on Facebook and click “like this.” No they showed up with their bodies and their hearts and their minds. Are we fully present in our life? Or are we present in body but our mind is someplace else? Are we fully present emotionally to our lives or have we locked part of ourselves away in fear? Are we showing up in our lives spiritually, truly investing our deeper selves in our life or are we kind of coasting. For us to have an epiphany in life, for us to actually meet the divine in our life, we need to show up.

These star gazers also bring gifts with them, and not just any old gifts. They bring gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. These are rich gifts. Likely the best they have. And when they discover that they were bringing these gifts into a stable in a middle-eastern backwater, rude and dirty, they didn't decide to... um... scale it back a little. No, they brought the best they had to

offer. You see I believe that every one of us, and we together as a church community have precious gifts to bring to life. And for a million different reasons we minimize what we have to offer: because we have been told we're not so special, or because we get intimidated by the gifts of another... You are the most precious gift you have to offer: your character, your best intention, your deepest dreams. Bring yourself to bear in this coming year and you will be offering your gold, frankincense and your myrrh.

And finally, these star gazers, after they offered their gifts, they went to sleep, and something new came to them. They had a plan to tell Herod where the child was but they got new information, changed their plans, went home by another road. I love this part of the story, because these guys who think they know what the future holds, change their mind and change their plans.

Today we celebrate those thinkers from afar who, by star gazing, discovered this hugely significant new birth. It was their epiphany. Epiphany: An awakening. An opening into higher consciousness. A discovery. A parting of the fog of confusion, revealing a new kind of clarity. Webster's says that an epiphany is a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. I believe that an awakening to the true meaning of it all, the fog clearing and the light of insight dawning is what we all long for. I also believe that as wondrous as star gazing is, the epiphanies about our life are not found by looking up. No, I believe they are found by showing up, by being utterly attentive to this moment and this life, and by bringing our whole self, our very best to bear with an openness to finding our way home by a new way. Amen.

Kenneth Rexroth

Here at the year's end, at the feast  
Of birth, let us bring to each other  
The gifts brought once west through deserts-  
The precious metal of our mingled hair,  
The frankincense of enraptured arms and legs,  
The myrrh of desperate, invincible kisses-  
Let us celebrate the daily  
Recurrent nativity of love,  
The endless epiphany of our fluent selves,  
While the earth rolls away under us  
Into unknown snows and summers,  
Into untraveled spaces of the stars.