

**Linda Driver**

**Athelstone Uniting Church #184**

**22 January 2023**

**From Generation to Generation: We keep seeking!**

**Text:** Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

Niina marni!

It is good to back with you once more. I've had a lovely break and am ready for a new year. I hope that's the case for you too!

We are in the season of Epiphany – when we remember the Magi who followed a special star, which guided them to the infant Jesus. It is a season of Light, of Awakening, of New Realisation, of A-hah! Moments.

And today we are following the star..

In the Kurna language, the word for star is 'purle'.

the Milky Way is seen as a celestial representation of the River Torrens (Karrawirraparri); which the Kurna call 'Wodliparri'.<sup>1</sup>

"The stars have always been guides for the Kurna people. They say, if you listen well to the stories from the old people across the generations and you remember what was said you can use this information to find certain stars that show you what is coming and how you must prepare.

There are many stories in the stars. Kurna people see them as they see the landscape they travel upon and where they journey to, as they sit with their ancestors in the Wodli- the huts alongside the Parri – one of the rivers of the Milky Way.<sup>2</sup>"

Stories handed on from generation to generation – it takes us back to our theme for Advent and Christmas – the stories we pass on from generation to generation are so important. For our faith, our culture, our identity and our wellbeing.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=2228395403845243&id=156305897720881](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2228395403845243&id=156305897720881) Aboriginal skies 'Paul Curnow

<sup>2</sup> <http://dreaminglight.info/>

ABC Adelaide shares photos on their facebook page which have been sent in by local photographers

This one is called Under the Milky Way tonight

South Australian photographer Blntpencil – not their real name - captured this stunning astrophotography shot of the Milky Way over Robe's Obelisk.

They say: "My goal is to reconnect people with the night sky and inspire more people to look up."

It's a wonderful goal... to reconnect people with the night sky and inspire more people to look up."

The people of God have been doing this for generation after generation.

David in Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (Psalm 8: 1,3,4)

And in Psalm 19:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. they have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

John Calvin, French theologian and pastor and key mover and shaker in the Protestant Reformation:

Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in this universe wherein you cannot discern at least some of [God's] glory. You cannot in one glance survey the most vast and beautiful system of the universe, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness"

"... it is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible."

Another famous reformer, Martin Luther, said:

God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.

The Magi were very connected with the night sky.

"They were seekers. They sought wisdom, they sought the divine, they sought fortunes to tell the future. Their seeking leads them to Jesus, the newborn king of another culture and religion. And yet, their seeking is also what protects them from Herod's deception and harm.

We can only speculate what kind of people the Magi were. Were they royalty? Astrologers? Sorcerers? Alchemists? Philosophers? Magicians?

Were there three or many? Were they all men, or were they an entourage of men and women, aged adults and young adults?

Despite the vagueness of their identities, we can learn much from their actions:

They observe the star and discern that it is pointing them to the divine.

Instead of ignoring it or simply observing it from afar, they decide to make the treacherous and arduous journey closer to Christ.

They cross over geographical, political, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries to seek out the newborn child.

They are filled with joy at the sight of the child and humble themselves before him, bowing and bearing gifts.

They listen intuitively to their dreams and evade Herod's deception, choosing what is perhaps a more difficult journey home by a different route.

Looking closely at the actions of the Magi, what can we learn from them? What do they teach us about being a seeker, as in, one who persistently seeks the sacred?

They are ones who look up and notice. They know the sky well and notice the change. They listen carefully to what God is saying through nature, through the Word, through their dreams. Part of seeking is to be aware of changes around you.

They take the courageous step to follow the star. Part of seeking is to take steps to find out more, even when we don't know where the journey will lead us.

Seeking can take us into places we don't expect and bring us face to face with all the wondrous diversity of God's people

When they find what they were seeking, they were overjoyed.

We too will have experiences – and perhaps remember times – when we have been overwhelmed with joy. We drop to our knees and praise God!

And then, we offer our gifts – our way of responding with thanks. Gifts of money and goods. Gifts of time and service, spiritual gifts given so that we can serve.

All to serve the One who inspires awe and wonder, who is loving and kind, full of grace and mercy.

One way we can seek the divine and journey closer to God, is through the gift of Star Words.

What are Star Words? The use of star words, is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in churches. "Star words" first appeared in a 2009 article written by Susan Foster in the publication Reformed Worship. In North America, Pastor Marci Auld Glass blogged about her congregation's experiences, and the idea began to spread among church communities inviting people of all ages to claim a word to define the year ahead.

The idea is that a list of guiding words are printed on paper stars. These paper stars are then arranged, most face down in a large basket.

A word is then drawn from the basket. That word becomes a guiding word throughout the year.

Typically, people are encouraged to trust the word they have drawn, and not to replace the word. However, there is not a strong need to be the "star police" if they want a replacement word.

They are encouraged to place their star word somewhere they will see it regularly throughout the year to allow consistent reflection on how God has moved through, around, or in connection to that word.

There are some key things to remember about star words:

The Magi followed a star, which ultimately led them to Jesus. Therefore, we too use all the resources we have available to us—including creative prayer practices and star words for the new year— to move closer to Jesus.

We trust that God uses multiple ways to guide us and speak to us. Star words are one such lens that might provide us a way to look for God in our midst, both actively and in hindsight.

We trust that it is often easy to miss God in our daily midst. Having an star word to consider both in present days, as well as to reflect on at the end of the year, allows for us to see God in ways we may not have seen God before. This is the greatest gift.

These words are not intended to replace the word of God in ordering our lives or be seen as magical.

By not looking or sorting through the star words at their selection, we practice the spiritual task of receiving. It is not we who are in control in this moment. Instead, we trust that God is present, and we let go of our desire to cultivate or control.<sup>3</sup>

The hope is that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, God will be at work in each individual through their word, helping to experience Christ in new ways for the year. Following the star leads us to expected places – just as the wise ones did not expect to find a baby, we may not expect what we find when we follow our stars.

We know that star words have made a difference for recipients. At various times during the year, we have star word services and hear from people who have stories to share about how their star word have brought them closer to God or provided fresh insight into a situation.

One of the gifts of these star words is days like today. After the service there will be conversations about the words you have received and what your first responses are – whether delighted, affirmed, mystified or confused!

this practice of shared faith is likely to continue in conversation for weeks to come.

We look back and give thanks for the insights God has brought us through our star words in the last 3 years.

We give thanks for the many stories shared as people have talked about their journey with their star word.

And so, this new year and every year to come, let us keep seeking, moving onward, following where God may lead.

---

<sup>3</sup> Liturgy for Epiphany Star Words written by Rev Sarah Speed. A Sanctified Art