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Grace Cathedral, San Francisco CA Z2
Evensong 33 - Epiphany Lessons and Carols
Thursday 10 January 2019

Matthew 2:1-12
Matthew 3:13-17
John 2:1-11

The Star at its Rising

"There ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising" (Mt. 2).

Nothing stays the same. No matter who you are, life is a pilgrimage. In body or spirit we either adapt to change or we die.

Last night at dinner Sarah Kay the poet and our former Artist in Residence told me about a college party at Brown University called Sex Power God. In short it is famous for having students dancing around in their underwear. The year before she arrived there the Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly sent an undercover reporter to video the event. Sarah described in detail how friends suddenly saw themselves half naked on television and worried about whether this would affect their careers.ⁱ

For years she forgot about the whole thing. Then last summer Sarah met a new friend who we will call Janet. They instantly recognized each other as soul mate. Janet is a filmmaker and a woman of color. When Sarah told her that she had gone to Brown, her friend said, "Oh" in the way people usually do when they had applied and not been accepted.

Janet explained that she loved Brown. The college had heavily recruited her in high school. Each week during the track season, Brown had called her coach to find out her times. In fact, Janet was not just accepted as an undergraduate but also into a special program that guaranteed her admission to medical school. It all seemed settled.

Then one day she came home as her father was turning off the television. He had been watching the Bill O'Reilly show. He had seen the episode about the party and told her that she was not allowed to go to Brown. Sarah feels convinced that the two would have been close friends in college and couldn't help but wonder how this event changed the course of Janet's life.

Change lies at the heart of all things. We are always accepting invitations or turning them down, embracing new possibilities or trying to shelter ourselves from change. During the Season of Epiphany we look for the light. We also listen for how God calls us out of our old habits and into a new relationship of love and gratitude with the world.

We recognize that what we do and how we live matters for people who we haven't even met.

In our Lessons and Carols service tonight we have three stories about invitation and persistence. The Magi leave everything behind to follow a star. At first they meet an insecure tyrant whose fear leads him to kill children. They persist in seeking. Ultimately they are, "overwhelmed with joy" when they encounter the baby Jesus (Mt. 2).

In the wilderness John thought that he understood what it would be like when the Messiah came. But he had to change. He had to accept the idea that he would baptize the Messiah. And when he did he saw, "the Spirit of God descending like a dove" (Mt. 3).

Finally at first Jesus himself seemed to imagine that his first miracle would involve a more weighty matter than providing wine for a wedding party. But his mother invited him to help and something moved him to begin his public ministry at that party.

Maybe you will be at a party when God calls you. Perhaps you will be at a track meet or in a newsroom or sitting watching television or in the wilderness or at Grace Cathedral.

Nothing stays the same. No matter who you are, life is a pilgrimage. In body or spirit we either adapt to change or we die. Listen for God. Persist in your calling. Do not be afraid to change your plans. Allow Jesus to transform the ordinary water of your life into something more. Let the star of God's grace guide you.

ⁱ Meryl Rothstein, "Fox News airs footage of Sex Power God," *The Brown Daily Herald*, 15 November 2005. <http://www.browndailyherald.com/2005/11/15/fox-news-airs-footage-of-sex-power-god/>