

Gifts of God for the People of God
Matthew 2:1-12; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
January 7, 2024
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It's star day! Every year in this church we celebrate Epiphany by drawing stars. Each star has a word on it. The words all represent gifts of the Holy Spirit, a word for each of us to ponder throughout the year, a word that may work in us in ways we don't expect.

Like the shepherds and the magi, we are also seeking the Christ Child. We each come to this journey in our own way, and God gives each of us the spiritual gifts we need to make our way to him. Like the magi, we may receive the gift of interpretation. Or maybe we will receive shepherd gifts: the ability to hear angels and the earnest desire to see for ourselves. Or perhaps we will receive the kinds of gifts that Paul describes in our scripture this morning, gifts that have built the church from the very beginning all the way to today. First Corinthians tells us there are varieties of spiritual gifts, but one giver gives them all. The gifts you need are not the same as the gifts I need, and the gifts we needed last year were different from the ones we will need in the year to come.

So, here is how it works: I have a great pile of cardboard stars here. On each of them is written a spiritual gift or discipline or activity – prayer for example, or peace, or music, or charity, and one of them is just for you! In a moment, the ushers will pass baskets with these stars to each of you, and I invite you to take one at random. The word you draw represents a spiritual gift for you for the coming year.

Often these gifts work in two different ways. Suppose your star says "hospitality." During the year you might find that you have opportunities to offer holy hospitality in ways you had not expected. Or – on the other hand – you might find that you need to learn to accept hospitality from others. The spiritual gift of hospitality works both ways, benefiting and challenging both the giver and the receiver. I hope you will be open to all the ways that the spiritual gift that is on your star might express itself in your life.

I invite you to receive the word that chooses you and to trust it. Put it in a place that you will see it regularly throughout the year – on your computer screen or your bathroom mirror or your fridge. Even if it doesn't seem to make sense to you right now, I think you will soon find that the word you draw has deep meaning for you in the coming weeks and months.

Sometimes the word we draw hits home immediately, and sometimes it needs to sink in over time. Last year, I drew the word "reconciliation." I was confused, but I pinned it to the edge of the shelf over my desk where I would see it many times every day. At least once a week, I wondered, "Who in this world am I supposed to reconcile with?" I couldn't think of anyone. Then, several weeks into the year, I realized that I hadn't yet made my own peace with aging. I was still expecting myself to feel and perform as though I were fifty years old. Friends, fifty is way back in my rearview mirror. So, I wrote a note to myself and put it on my fridge. It said, "It's okay to be older." I tried to figure out what I would do, or think, or feel differently if I truly believed that it is okay to be the age I am. And over a few months, that simple exercise made a huge difference in my life, in my spirit. I was so confused when I drew my star last year. I am so grateful for it now.

Carol Asher has a wonderful story of the star words she has drawn in the last two years. It appears in the January newsletter. I encourage you all to read it.

I also find it interesting how star words repeat. My beloved Dave drew the same star word two years in a row. What is that about, I wonder. Don and Jill Morton each drew the same star word last year. Two years ago, I happened to be watching as two wonderful women drew the same word: "leadership." Neither of them wanted to draw that star word. Both are amazing leaders for this church.

Sometimes our star words are comforting. Sometimes they are challenging. And sometimes, they make us ponder for a while. So, let's have a prayer first, and then we will all have an opportunity to draw a star word to ponder for the coming year. Let us pray:

Holy God, we give you thanks for all the ways that you equip us to be your people. As you guided the magi to the Christ Child, you give us the spiritual gifts and disciplines we need to guide us to you. Help us to be open to the gifts that you offer us now, and help us to understand in the coming weeks and months what this gift might mean for our faith and for our lives as children of God.

Amen