

Bow before his brightness

By [Erin Martin](#)

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For a preacher, the challenge of Epiphany is that it comes every year. The story unfolds as it always does: King Herod, the wise men from the East, gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. By now, the pageant is overplayed. The star of wonder has lost its awe. How, in this over-handled text, can anything new break through?

Yet this year something new did break through. As I read Matthew's account of the journey of the Magi to Jerusalem in search of the child born king of the Jews, I was struck, not by the aspects of prophecy fulfilled or the astrological phenomenon of the star, but by the wise men's raw, unrestrained response—they worshiped. Earlier biblical translations read, "When they saw that the star had stopped, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." The description bends over backward with expression! The NRSV tries to subdue the hyperbole, saying simply they were "overwhelmed with joy," but that sounds like an understatement. Something amazing happened to the wise men. They had a moment of revelation, a transcendent experience of the divine, and they could not contain their joy. Ronald Goetz writes, "They had lost the composure and reserve of scholars and sages, giving way to an ecstasy of naked adoration." When was the last time that happened to you in worship?

The celebration of the epiphany is an invitation to praise. It is an opportunity to be so moved by God's appearing in our midst that we cannot help but "fall down and worship him." In this case, the task of the preacher may be to just get out of the way and let the people pay their homage.

St. Theresa of Avila in the 16th century asked, "How is it that there are not many who are led by sermons to forsake open sin? I think that's because preachers have too much worldly wisdom. They are not like the Apostles (or the wise men for that matter), flinging it all aside and catching fire with love of God, and so their flame gives little heat." What worldly wisdom could we possibly add to the already intense heat and brilliance of God's loving manifestation to us in Jesus Christ? What if this

year we attempted to say little but instead tried to bask much in the beauty of God's perfect light given to us in the Christ child? What if we just knelt down?