

Grafted

By [F. Dean Lueking](#)

January 18, 2011

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Lueking's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Epiphany is the season uniquely applicable to us who are Gentiles, the grafted-on branches to the tree of salvation, those who do well to marvel at the magnitude of the grace of God Christ that includes us. This is not common in our religiously pluralist setting, especially in our part of the world where the common assumption is that we're not grafted on at all--we're mainstream.

In my [lectionary column](#) for the *Century* this week (subscription required), I bring up the dramatic shifts the world has seen in Christian demographics. My understanding of this has been helped immensely by one thing: pastoral sabbaticals. I took two during my pastoral years, in each case to visit congregations in developing-world countries for the purpose of learning from them what it's like to be a Christian in that place.

Bringing those experiences back to the congregation I served was enriching all around. It enabled bridge-building connections that grew and deepened over time, as Christians from overseas spent time with us and expanded our local experience of the global church. It also enabled me to alert parishioners traveling abroad as tourists, business people, students or military personnel to visit congregations and fellow Christians wherever they can find them. [Here](#) I weave some of these people's stories into the larger narrative of global church change.

It's tremendously important and satisfying to be part of such Epiphany connecting and recruiting. I know of nothing more effective in stirring a congregation from spiritual myopia to the broader vision of what God is doing in our world. It's another facet of Epiphany light, well worth our prayers, preaching and Spirit-moved participation in that kingdom once announced in Capernaum--the kingdom that

extends to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.