

WORDS TO PONDER ALL YEAR LONG

Star Gifts

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE
BY SUSAN FOSTER

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The season after Christmas and before Lent can often seem like a “down” time in the church year—as if we’re simply marking time while waiting for another grand celebration. Whether it is because people are suffering from holiday fatigue or influenced by gloomy winter weather, the season of Epiphany can go by unnoticed and unheralded.

To mark this in-between season at Plymouth this year, in the midst of the ongoing pandemic, we are sharing “star gifts.” A star gift is simply a piece of brightly colored paper with a word printed on it. Every person in our congregation is receiving a star gift by mail and we’re asking each of you to reflect on that word for the coming year. **You are invited to ponder what significance this word might have in your life, and how God might be speaking to you through that simple message.** We drew from a list of more than 150 words, each with its own message and significance. In this moment, we are not asking you to give; we are inviting you to receive. It reminds us

that **this is always the order of things in God’s realm—God always gives first, and then we are invited to respond with our gifts and ourselves.**

RECEIVING GIFTS

The magi who traveled great distances to offer their gifts to the newborn Christ-child were responding to the gift first given to them. They received God’s gift, then offered their gifts to God. As we commemorate the arrival of the magi and remember their offerings, we delight in this paper reminder that symbolizes God’s generosity in our lives.

In this season of long uncertainty, people are yearning for tangible, clear signs of God’s presence. We are a congregation filled with compassionate people who are good at being busy and “doing” for God. This Epiphany Sunday celebration represents a change in our routine, or perhaps a way to reframe what the pandemic has made more routine than we’d like; people are offered the opportunity

(over)

to **“be still” in the presence of God and to receive God’s gifts.**

This is not because we have done anything to merit such attention, but simply because of God’s abundant generosity.

“PONDER THESE WORDS IN YOUR HEARTS”

Each of you who receives a star gift is encouraged to keep it where you are sure to see it every day. It may be on your bathroom mirror, or next to your computer screen, or travel as a bookmark in your favorite book. Other congregations who have been using this practice for some time note that many people keep their star gifts from year to year; gradually accumulating a virtual constellation of wise words and encouragement displayed as a reminder of God’s presence in our lives.

We invite you to **allow your word to speak to you.** You might start by looking the word up in the dictionary so that you are clear on its meaning; we hear the word grace all the time, but what exactly does it mean? A word that seems unclear at the beginning may gain new meaning as the year goes on.

It may be that your word seems very timely, as if it was indeed designated for you. You may be unsure how this word applies to your life as the year opens. Stay open to the possibility that the Spirit could be speaking to you and moving in you through this word.

Out of Receiving Comes Sharing

Throughout the season of Epiphany, [and through the year], you are encouraged to share some thoughts, either briefly or at length, about your star gifts. This might be with a photo on social media — [#plymouthchurch](#) [#stargifts](#). It might be a testimony



shared in worship.

Thus it can be that on a bright summer Sunday in the heat of August, we will be reminded of that frigid January Sunday when we were physically distant and spiritually gathered in the dim winter light. We reflect on the God who continually encourages and strengthens God’s people. Perhaps that is the delight of star gifts— they truly are a gift that keeps on giving, even long after the Epiphany season is over.

Like any other gift, star gifts can either be received with joy or discarded and forgotten. People need to be intentional about their response to their star gift. Will the paper stars be stuffed into your pocket or jammed into the bottom of your purse, never to be considered again? Or will that word be considered an opportunity—a chance to reflect on how God speaks to God’s people? What might we learn from one word? What new ideas might evolve, what treasured wisdom might resurface? If you find the star gift to be meaningful, let us know.

Epiphany is the celebration of God’s presence breaking through to shine as a light in the darkness. This year we rejoice in the reminder of our generous, giving God—one star gift at a time.

If you have children or youth in your household from age 3 through high school, please keep your eyes peeled for special star gift programming that is age appropriate. More information will be coming soon via our Child & Family Ministry, Confirmation, and High School Youth Programs.