

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2025
SERMON “EPIPHANY IS WHO SHOWS UP”
SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 2:1-12
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Matthew 2:1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

**6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”**

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Sermon: Epiphany is Who Shows Up

Is anyone’s favorite month January?

Statistically, it’s probably not. January often feels like the Monday of the year. The elation of Christmas, with its joy, hope, and sparkling lights, has passed, leaving us with the cold reality of a bleak midwinter, the start of tax season, and perhaps the creeping realization that our ambitious New Year’s resolutions may already be faltering. Even birthdays seem less celebrated in January—it’s actually the least likely month to welcome new babies.

And yet, in the church’s liturgical calendar, January is the time of Epiphany. This season marks the conclusion of Christmas and the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God to all peoples. It’s the moment the Magi arrive, guided by a star, proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah to the people of Jerusalem.

We use the word “epiphany” in our culture too. When someone says, “I’ve had an epiphany!” it often means an unexpected moment of clarity that seems to illuminate everything. Both culturally and in the manifestation of the Son of God, January—with all its Monday-vibe dreariness—doesn’t seem like the proper setting for such vibrant, hopeful breakthroughs.

Yet, perhaps January's blandness is exactly where Epiphany belongs.

The Magi, whose story marks the moment of Epiphany in the church calendar, were themselves actually bland people comparatively to whom the community imagined would deliver the news of Epiphany. They were outsiders—pagan foreigners with no ties to the Jewish faith or people. Despite the little crowns they wear in our nativity set, or the song “We Three Kings,” these men weren't actually kings. The Magi were likely astrologers from the East, skilled in interpreting the stars.*

The people of Jerusalem were expecting a great King or a Significant Somebody from their own faith to deliver the Epiphany that the Messiah had arrived. Instead, astrologers, outsiders in the grand scheme of the Jewish story, came to tell Jerusalem that the Messiah was born not to a wealthy family of high status, but in a manger among the animals. To the Jewish people, their methods and outsider status might have seemed unconventional, even irrelevant, and yet God chose them to announce the Messiah's arrival. In this context, the Magi probably represented the deflation of hope, like January feels after the festivities of December—a deflation of how or whom this very important message of hope and salvation would come.

So, the story of the Magi doesn't fit the usual narrative of dramatic heroism and high status. Instead, it reminds us of something far more profound: the way God's light is revealed in unexpected, humble ways. The Magi—outsiders, strangers—were the ones chosen to witness and announce the arrival of Christ. They were the ones who, despite their foreignness, brought the good news to the heart of the Jewish world. In a sense, they represent the humble, unexpected ways in which God often chooses to reveal Himself.

This theme of unexpected humility is at the heart of Epiphany. It's not about grand gestures or extraordinary displays. Instead, Epiphany is about noticing who shows up and how God reveals Himself through simple, faithful actions. Just as the Magi followed showed up as unlikely messengers to an unlikely place—we, too, are invited to find God in the steady, faithful presence of those around us. Epiphany calls us to pay attention to the quiet, everyday moments where love and faithfulness appear, even in the bleakness of January after the joy of Christmas fades.

Just as the Magi experienced an epiphany that led them to Jesus, I've had my own epiphany about where God's work is most profoundly revealed in my life. Through seminary and most of my career, I felt called to high-stakes chaplaincy and outreach, with homeless populations and refugees in some of the world's most challenging contexts. I helped build a refugee school system in Syria and served as the national refugee minister for our denomination, and I was the Chaplain for the largest homeless organization in one of the highest homelessness concentrated states in our country. When I shared these roles with strangers at parties who asked what I did, people would often respond with admiration. And honestly, it was gratifying to see their awe.

But when I left that work to become the pastor of this small, modest church, the reactions from strangers at parties shifted. When I tell people what I do now, I often get one of two responses: an awkward silence or a surprised, “Women can do that?” Somehow, being a local church pastor doesn't carry the same glittering appeal as being a director of a high-profile social program.

And yet, here's my epiphany: The work we do here at Kailua Christian Church is just as meaningful—if not more so—than the louder, “sexier” work of my previous positions.

Epiphany isn't the loud, glittery drama of Christmas. It doesn't come with choirs of angels or triumphant fanfare. Instead, it quietly shows up in January—the bleak month after the joy and

sparkle of Christmas have faded. This is purposeful. Epiphany doesn't demand attention; it invites reflection. It doesn't arrive with great, triumphant revelations but through the simple, quiet truth of who shows up.

In the story of Jesus' birth, Epiphany happens when the Magi—a group of outsiders, strangers, and unlikely witnesses—show up to honor the Messiah. They weren't kings, prophets, or anyone the world would expect to carry the news of a Savior's arrival. They were humble astrologers following a star, stepping into a story far larger than themselves. Their presence was unexpected, but it was also essential.

That's the heart of Epiphany: God reveals Himself not through cultural expectations of power and triumph but through those who show up in faithfulness, humility, and love.

As the pastor of Kailua Christian Church, I've come to see the manifestation of January's humble, but vitally important, Epiphany here. To the outside world, leading a small, local church may not seem as impressive as directing social services for refugees or managing large-scale homelessness programs. Those roles were culturally celebrated, seen as heroic and urgent. But here's the epiphany I've experienced in this season of my life: the work of this church, of showing up for one another, is just as transformative—if not more so.

The people who show up in this church aren't flashy or seeking recognition. They're the ones who bring meals to those who are sick, who hold space for others in grief, who pray for each other in times of need, and who gather week after week to worship, to serve, and to love. This work, this faithfulness, is where I see God revealed most profoundly.

Think about your own life. When have you experienced an epiphany in the quiet January months of your heart—the times when life felt bleak, and the celebrations were long past? Who showed up for you in those moments? Who were the stable, faithful people who carried you through?

Epiphany happens in those moments. It happens in the showing up, in the steady love of community, and in the quiet acts of kindness that don't make headlines but transform lives.

As we reflect on this season of Epiphany, I encourage you to look beyond what the world says triumph should look like. Don't wait for grand gestures or dramatic signs. Instead, pay attention to the people who show up—the ones who walk with you, support you, and reflect God's love in quiet but powerful ways.

Here at Kailua Christian Church, we are a people who show up—for each other and for Jesus. And in that showing up, we find the presence of God revealed. So, as we move through this January season, let's be reminded: Epiphany is not about the glitter and fanfare. It's about faithfulness. It's about love. It's about who shows up.

Amen.

⋄ Biblical history note: *The "Kings" designation is thought to have been borne from the 3rd century Christian philosopher Origen, who assumed they had noble descent based on the very expensive gifts they brought for Jesus. Isaiah 60:3 also says the Epiphany would be brought by Kings – although we see repeatedly in the Gospel story of Jesus' birth that all the grandeur of the Messiah's arrival predicted in the Old Testament was made meek and lowly in the actual arrival of Jesus, which was disconcerting to many Jewish prophets at the time and the predominant reason many of them did not believe He was actually the Messiah.