

January 4, 2026 Star Sunday

- Isaiah 60:1-6 - Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 - Ephesians 3:1-12 - Matthew 2:1-12

“Your light has come”

1. A few of years ago, Cal Brand shared a book with me which was very meaningful to him.
  - a. It's called Poustinia: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer (the word means desert in Russian).
  - b. It is a book about a spiritual practice of silence and listening to God, something which had made a big impact on him.
  - c. His copy from the 1970s was well worn and was precious to him.
  - d. He wanted me to read it so he lent it to me, but I didn't want to hurt his copy so I found it on Amazon as a Kindle book, and I returned his paperback copy to him.
  - e. The writer is modern Russian mystic Catherine Doherty, who lived in Canada.
  - f. She writes about a very Russian way a person called by God would become this kind of “desert dweller” right in the town where they lived
  - g. The Poustinia was their own little desert, a hut somewhere, a place in the woods, where they lived in poverty to listen to God...
  - h. In the outskirts of a busy city, or near a quiet town, the “desert dweller” sought complete isolation in order to be able to hear God speak, reading only the Bible and writing down what came to them.
  - i. But also they were there to serve others, because being in the Poustinia was for the benefit of others, as the “desert dweller” prayed for others, listened to God, and assisted others in need as they came to ask for help.
  - j. Someone could come and ask for prayer or come ask for help bringing in the hay in the field before the rains, and the person in the poustinia would stop their reading and meditation to tend to the person asking for help.
  - k. Imagine that kind of call to listening to God
    - i. All day read just a few verses or a page, let it really rest in your heart.
    - ii. Jot a few insights down
    - iii. God will speak. But when? Keep listening.
2. It's hard to wait for God to speak to us.
  - a. Sometimes it feels like God dictating a recipe to us, but we get one ingredient at a time,
  - b. It will take time to see the divine recipe slowly come together,
  - c. And then even more time as that spiritual meal God is preparing for us, bakes or simmers slowly in that silent interaction between God and us.
  - d. Wouldn't it be easier if you just gave me a sign, God? Show me where it says “this way” or “make this decision.”
  - e. A billboard, something hard to miss!
  - f. A star maybe?
3. The Wise Magi the gospel introduced us to had been watching, studying, taking note.

- a. I wonder if they had been expecting SOMETHING in particular to happen, or they just kept watch until such a time as ANYTHING unusual happened.
  - b. Either way, when they saw it, they compared notes, they realized they had SOMETHING in their hands.
  - c. Your light has come (wrote Isaiah)! But what? They interpreted it – a new king. So they went in a hurry, to be the first foreign delegation to pay their respects in what they expected would be a joy-filled palace, only to find an insecure and ruthless king who didn't want to be dethroned.
  - d. The Magi make their way eventually to Jesus, bringing their gifts and the incredible story of their journey
  - e. And there was one last message for them: take the long way home, for your safety. And to Mary, Joseph and the baby: go into exile in a foreign land to escape so Herod doesn't kill you.
4. The message God has for us this morning is one which is still in the process of being delivered. Our light HAS come, our star IS here: but what is God saying to us?
- a. As Jen and the children have told us, we've taken a different perspective on our traditional Star Sunday, and we're inviting each of us into discernment of what it is God is guiding us towards this year.
  - b. This isn't cheating or avoiding our responsibility (it's not a fill-in-the-blanks sermon, and not a "choose your own adventure" star)
  - c. Instead, it's the silent invitation of the Poustinia, of the Magi listening under an imposing night sky: What is God whispering to you? Write that word on your star
  - d. But I want to affirm this for each of us: If your star is blank at the end of the day, tape it where you can see it everyday and keep listening to what God is inviting you to write on it, the word or words God is speaking in the depth of your heart.
  - e. It may be a word that's already clear to you, but you've been afraid to admit
  - f. It may be a word you can't quite hear because of all the static and noise but you can hear SOMETHING is trying to break through. Keep listening.
5. Breathe with me, please... [Silence] [Two deep Breaths]
6. Listen deep in your hearts to God's voice. Don't be in a hurry because the message may come a little bit at a time. Listen and be ready for action: to help someone near you; to take the long way home as God's message to you changes the way you look at the world.

Doherty, Catherine. Poustinia: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer . Madonna House Publications. Kindle Edition.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/epiphany-of-our-lord/commentary-on-isaiah-601-6-13>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/epiphany-of-our-lord/commentary-on-matthew-21-12-15>

Reflection questions:

1. Share a story of a time when God clearly spoke to you, and what you did about it.
2. What is an area of your life where you'd love for God to give you a clear word for 2026?
3. What are two or three possible words God may have already been whispering to you about it?