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*Still Up Ahead*

The star stopped over where she testified and then kept shining up ahead. In some ways we could not be more different but she led me to just where I needed to be.

Her warmth and openness was contagious. She had agreed to be our elder for the three day long worship conference titled “Stones Cry Out- learning to pray with the land” last summer. She spoke with such wisdom. Her name is Lorna Standingready. She is an indigenous elder and residential school survivor. With grace she led us into a deeper experience of indigouness culture, ritual, and spirituality. With her vulnerability she invited us into her world. She is one of those people you just want to listen to. You lean in when she speaks and when she prays. At least for me- it was like she was following that same star that the magi saw because the more time I spent with her the more I saw Christ in all his multivalent mosaics- ever moving toward me.

Who has been a magi for you? What stranger has been a docent for your soul and opened new space in your heart and mind?

In the words of an epiphany carol, This star drew near to the northwest, o'er Bethlehem it took its rest; and there it did both stop and stay right over the place where Jesus lay.

They could not have been more different and yet they lead us still to just where we need to be.

Wise Men. Magi. They were zoroastrian priests. With curiosity and devotion they observed the star at its rising and kept following it past the political and religious power centers all the way to Bethlehem. There they found the child, knelt down and paid him homage. What faith and risk.

Even at two years old, vulnerable and dependent on others, he is a threat to the world as it is. Throughout his life he will continue to expose those who exploit and exercise power over others. His power is made perfect in weakness. He uses his authority to lay down his life for others. His rule is gentle and generative. It draws the circle wider.

These star-gazers point us towards what God first revealed to the shepherds, to all nations, and now to you and me some two thousand years and even more miles into the future. The promise persists across time and cultures, peoples and places. Always being made real for you. The one born in Bethlehem of Judea is the ruler and savior of all. A shepherd king.

The star will stop and stay over many places throughout Jesus' life. Wherever anyone is in need of healing, where the left out and left behind search for a place to belong, where the tired need a spot to lay down their burdens, where sinners search for a word of forgiveness in a world of retribution, where dead ends pile up. Where light seems in short supply.

The star will stop over the most unlikely of places as it rests over that hill outside Jerusalem as darkness covers the whole land and Jesus cries out forsaken. There we see the full revelation-epiphany of our God. Jesus- come all the way down, emptying himself and bearing our sin and death in his own body. There: death becomes life for you.

Refusing to be extinguished in death, the light of the world will rise again as the star will then stop over the empty tomb. From Golgotha to the garden. The star still shines up ahead, leading us towards where God continues to be manifest. Still insisting on shining especially when we are shrouded in shadows. The flickering flame of our faithful God determined and not diminished. Where might it stop and stay?

Here. Over this bit of water connected to the little word and these two. Harper and Collins- temples of the Holy Spirit, wise ones, co-workers of ours. What might they reveal to us about our God who delights in the little ones of this world? Over this table- a morsel of bread and a sip of wine or juice- all that God could ever give. Jesus' body and blood. Our God who stays with us in every season of our lives. Revealed in small, humble nourishment for hungry people.

Over you. Your own body, dependent, vulnerable, wise, a home for God. A dwelling place for the most high. The body of Christ. When your light is dimmed in despair or doubt, and even when it seems to have been snuffed out, Christ's light still shines for you. He will brighten your way through every valley- carrying you into each day. His light is a gift. Just as it is given to the newly baptized it was given to you. It cannot be put out. We share it. Holding the light for others. Letting them hold it for us. Sometimes we carry it into the night as phototropic prophets of the world to come. This star- never stuck back there- is still up ahead beckoning us into tomorrow. Who might guide us to its coordinates in 2025?

Magi. Astrologers. Children. Teenagers. Those who are older. Those not from around here or who worship in languages or liturgies not ours. Alongside them you will discover, as I did with Elder Lorna, that God's love is more boundless. God's reign, more expansive still. There is enough room for us all and you too. Hear the good news: there is no competing for space, or anything else, in the presence of this gracious God of all nations. The tent stretches like the heavens.

This star draws near, o'er Bethlehem and here it takes its rest and it does both stop and stay right over the places where Jesus continues to be found. Epiphanies abound.

