When I was a teenager and I would like a boy, I used to concoct ways to run into him. For example, I’d find ways to walk in the same hallway where he would be going to class or find excuses to walk by his house, even if it meant going out of my way. Perhaps you may have had a similar experience or know someone else who has. We did this because we were excited to get to know this person better and wanted an opportunity to be in relationship with this person. We were willing to slightly rearrange our lives to receive just one or two minutes of being with this person.

The Maji wanted to know Jesus and to spend time with Jesus and were willing to go considerably out of their way to do this. This is, in contrast to Herod, who wanted nothing to do with this Savior except to kill him so that he wouldn’t pose a threat to Herod’s own kingship. The Maji, in fact, wanted so much to get to know Jesus that they had been watching the heavens for years for a specific heavenly alignment that would tell them Jesus had been born. Although Gentiles, they would have been familiar with the Jewish prophecies about where a king was to be born. Because they were seeking Christ and had taken the time to become knowledgeable about what would lead them to Him, they recognized the “star” when they saw it and they chose to follow it.

What actually constituted the star has been a subject of wide discussion since Biblical times. Three theories seem to be dominant. One is that the star was a supernova, although there is no historical evidence for that. The other is that the star was a comet, like Halley’s comet. Halley’s comet, however, came about 7 years too early for the birth of Christ. Another comet, however, was witnessed by Chinese astronomers in 4BCE, which is a possibility. The most widely accepted possibility for the star is a third theory, which is the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, which is known to have occurred at about the right time. Jupiter was known at that time as a royal star and Saturn as the star of the Sabbath so such a conjunction, to those who had been looking for it, may well have signified the birth of Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of the Sabbath.

Whatever heavenly event occurred, however, was seen and interpreted by the Magi when others missed it because they had been watching for it. They chose to drop everything else they had been doing to follow it because they sincerely wanted a connection with this king – this Savior. They chose to ignore Herod’s command to tell him the location of the Savior because they were warned that Herod meant the new king harm. In their encounter with Jesus, they had been converted – transformed -- and they no longer vowed allegiance to earthly royal edicts if they conflicted with those of heaven. So, they returned to their homes by a route that would avoid Herod.

The clear message for us is that we also are called to be watchful of ways in which Jesus manifests Himself to us today. One hopes that we encounter Jesus in church, through breaking open the Word of God and through participating at the Table. But Jesus comes in less obvious places as well.

Perhaps you remember a TV show of several years ago called Joan of Arcadia or the song it was based around, “What if God Were One of Us,” which was sung by Joan Osborne and written by a member of her band. The premise of the song – and show—is that you can encounter God in unexpected places – in a stranger on the bus, as a cafeteria worker at school, in that person that is of a different nationality or socioeconomic class than we are, in a homeless person. Because truthfully, Christ is in all persons and we will find Christ if we seek Him. We, like the Wise Men, are called to rearrange our lives to be in relationship with Christ in all ways in which Christ manifests Himself to us. That means sometimes in people that we think are unlikeable. That means in members of our family. That means in us.

Christ is also involved in events in our lives and in the lives of others. If we follow the example of the Wise Men, we will also be alert to where Christ is working in the world and join Him there. We will follow Christ wherever He is and we will worship Him through reaching out to those around us in love.

When we, like the Wise Men, seek and find Christ, we will also be transformed. The more time we spend in relationship with Christ – in worship of Christ – the more pronounced is that transformation. When we are transformed, we may also change our route and go a different way, rejoicing anew from our close contact with the Risen Lord.

Amen