



Greetings!

Please read [Isaiah 60: 1-6](#), [Matthew 12: 1-12](#), and [Luke 3:15-17, 21-22](#)

West Ohio Conference pastor, the Rev. Alan Brown, reminds us in a Facebook post that Epiphany means to *“make manifest.”* The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber points out in her post of the insecurity of King Herod, who was *“so threatened by the birth of Jesus that he tried to overthrow the result by putting a hit out on the toddler.”* Insecurity is a problem indeed, and it undermines the creative power of God in our lives.

Insecure people can become despotic, dictatorial, expert manipulators, and narcissistic - only out for themselves. Throughout history the insecure have amassed great power, used people for their personal pleasure, all while destroying institutions, nations and civilizations. Our founder John Wesley knew that people could not or would not on their own, choose to walk in the light, but needed discipline to take us from *where we are* to *where we need to go*. Last week I talked about the courage it takes to pray the Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition. In the midst of this prayer is the deep connection with the Means of Grace, of which Baptism is one.

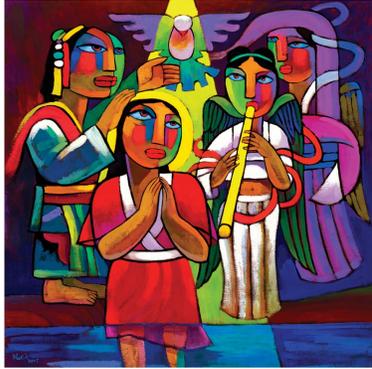
In today's texts which point to Epiphany and Baptism we get a directional point of view. Directions are deeply important because like discipline, they lead us on the journey. Young Carter Balmos Ruddock in 2018 asked a question about this very thing in the season of Epiphany. *“We Three Kings says, Westward leading,” but The First Noel says, “star shining in the East” and “drew nigh to the Northwest.” Which way was it?* What a great question. We should just let that hang in some space to contemplate our multidirectional God.



The Magi, James He Qi, 1999

In the question asked by Carter is an age-old question, “Where can we find God?” The

answer is different for many but there are some pathways, the means of Grace, the gift of Baptism and our Remembrance of it for purposes of our inward renewal. The gift of light that guides us to personal and spiritual discovery that vanquishes our insecurities and fills us with hope.



Jesus' Baptism, James He Qi, 2005

The artist James He Qi injects the color blue in all his works. Blue is the color of hope. Many of Qi's paintings depict difficult or challenging stories of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection as found in the Gospels. But there is this persistent theme – blue – hope – a theological claim – a constant.

As we center on these images for this week in the Christian Year, may we be mindful that while we revel in them – who doesn't like light or baptisms? – they have come to us as free gifts. These gifts are not intended to be a one-time offer, but rather to be the foundation of a lifetime of faith and practice.

I'd like to close by asking you to ponder the following questions:

- When was the last time you engaged in the [Means of Grace](#)?
- How has your life benefited from God made manifest in your experience?
- And how has this ministered to your insecurities (we all have them) in such a way that they have become blessing instead of embarrassment for you?
- In what ways can you witness to the direction of God in your life as a free gift for others?

Peace,

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