

Epiphany January 4 2026 New Year, New Way

When I was growing up, my family's vacations were all road trips.

Eight of us (six kids and my parents) crammed into our station wagon - without air conditioning -

for a long drive to the beach or an amusement park.

Once we arrived I had a great time,

but I dreaded the ride there and back.

Last month I read a travel article titled,

The 33 Rules of a Roadtrip.

Here are a few rules that jumped out at me:

If you're the driver, don't be distracted.

If you're not behind the wheel, no back seat driving.

And no whining.

Plan out your pit stops.

And my favorite that we should have followed as kids:

Don't keep asking, "are we there yet?"

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord.

God's Son was revealed to the nations by the guidance of a star.

I love how Epiphany always falls at the beginning of a new year -

a time when people make resolutions to change course in life.

Maybe you've resolved to get in shape, get motivated,

or try something new in 2026.

All great decisions.

Decisions that come as result of soul searching - of asking the question,

"How do I want my life to look this year?"

In the gospel today we heard how God called the magi and St. Joseph

to take a different path in life to help bring about his vision for the world.

Let's dive in.

Before I talk about the gospel story, let me start with

the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

He lived during a very turbulent time for his country.

The mighty Babylonian army invaded, attacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and took many citizens back to Babylon as slaves.

Isaiah had a vision that one day their exile would end, they'd return home and rebuild the temple.

So in today's reading, he painted a hopeful picture of the future.

Here's what Isaiah wrote:

Screen: Rise up in splendor Jerusalem!

upon you the Lord shines

and over you, appears his glory.

Nations shall walk by your light,

and kings by your shining radiance....

they all gather and come to you.

And then, as if he was watching the very first Epiphany,

Isaiah prophesied that caravans of camels from the east would arrive with gold and frankincense.

Isaiah was reminding God's people that they were chosen

to share their faith with the world - to draw others to God's Kingdom.

Then today's gospel revealed Isaiah's prophecy coming to pass.

Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem asking,

"Where is the new born king of the Jews?"

"We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

This was the epiphany, the moment of revelation.

Jesus wouldn't just be the savior of Israel but the savior of the world.

But the magi's road trip was far from over.

When the magi discovered that the new born king was not to be found in King Herod's palace but in Bethlehem, they had to change course and then they set out again.

Finally they found the baby and offered their gifts - mission accomplished.

And when God warned them in a dream to not return to Herod,

they traveled home by another way.

SCREEN: blank red background

To me, the story of Epiphany is a story of amazing faithfulness and courage.

Think about it.

The magi left their home country, made a long, difficult journey, in search of a baby, with only a star to guide them.

And they didn't do this because they loved road trips.

No, they did it because they heard the voice of God and knew they had to follow.

And to me, that's the perfect definition of faithfulness:

God calls, you respond.

And imagine the courage it took to disobey King Herod's instruction.

By not returning to Jerusalem to reveal the baby's location - they saved the child's life.

We see this same faithfulness and courage in Joseph.

If today's gospel had continued for a few more verses,

we'd have heard how God sent this message to Joseph in a dream:

SCREEN: Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you.

Joseph obeyed God's instruction and set out for Egypt.

Like the magi, this required Joseph to set out into unknown territory, with no preparation or planning.

He set out with a wife who'd just given birth and with their new born son.

It must have been overwhelming and stressful for Joseph, and it was definitely courageous.

SCREEN: blank red background

What's the message here for us at the start of this new year?

What can we learn from the road trips that the magi and Joseph undertook?

I think they provide us with a few rules that we should follow in life.

SCREEN: listen for God's voice

Here's the first rule: listen for God's voice.

Now, you might be thinking that the magi and Joseph received clear instructions in their dreams about where to go and what to do.

They never doubted that God was speaking to them.

I don't know about you, but I've never had dreams from God that contained travel instructions.

But that's not to say that God doesn't speak to us, because he does.

God speaks to us all the time.

To hear God we just need to adjust our frequencies so that we become more attuned to His voice.

If you're wondering what God's voice will sound like in your life, it could be as simple as someone popping up in your mind.

I've had this happen, I'm sure you have too.

A family member or friend you haven't talked to in a while comes to mind - maybe in a dream.

That could be God prompting you to reach out and reconnect.

Or, it might be a sense of dissatisfaction with a relationship.

That might be God prompting you

to have that difficult conversation you've been putting off.

It could be a thought that just keeps rolling around in your head -

an idea of something to tackle at home, or work, or in your neighborhood or parish.

Could that be God prompting you to action?

It might be a person who shows up one day with an unusual request that gives you a new perspective you hadn't considered.

Over time, and with the help of prayer,

you'll discover what God's voice sounds like for you.

And one simple way to start is to begin each morning with this prayer:

Lord, show me who I can serve today.

Lord, show me who I can serve today.

Then be attentive throughout your day to those

promptings, those thoughts, and the people you encounter.

But don't ignore them or dismiss them, lest you miss out on God speaking to you.

SCREEN: be open to going in a new direction

And if you're willing to respond, the second rule we learn

from the magi and Joseph is, be open to going in a new direction.

God won't ask you to undertake a long, treacherous road trip to meet a newborn king like the magi.

And probably won't tell you to leave everything behind and flee for safety like Joseph.

But like them, God will ask you to respond with faithfulness and maybe even some courage.

In the Christmas stories we've been hearing at Mass over the past two weeks we've seen how the people God spoke to responded with incredible flexibility and openness.

They were willing to let go of their expectations and plans in life and go in a different direction.

When they put their trust in God, he revealed a new way to go.

God needs you to be like them.

So be open to interruptions, course corrections, and adjustments in life.

Be flexible and be open to the unexpected.

In fact, expect the unexpected.

When God speaks to us, it almost always entails upsetting our status quo in some way -

shaking up the comfortable, easy, routines of our lives.

So the unexpected text from a loved one or friend might be an opportunity to help them through a rough patch.

Losing your job or getting furloughed can be an opportunity to pursue something new or to reevaluate your priorities in life.

SCREEN: don't wait, act

And the final rule we learn from the magi and Joseph is, when God presents you with an opportunity, don't wait, take action.

Don't delay reaching out when someone comes to mind.

Don't put off that difficult conversation.

Don't wait for someone else to respond to that person in need.

And if you're feeling dissatisfied with the direction of your life in 2025,

resolve to take a step to change in 2026.

I can say with absolute certainty that God will speak to each of us many times in the next twelve months.

Hopefully you've heard God's voice today in this Mass.

I started off mentioning that article that listed 33 rules for road trips.

Here again are the three rules we heard in today's story of the Epiphany:

listen for God's voice,

be open to a new direction,

and don't wait, act.

SCREEN: It's Your Move main screen

And next week we will begin our first message series of 2026 titled, It's Your Move.

In the readings at Mass over the next four weekends we will be introduced to more individuals who heard God calling them.

They'll teach us how we can respond to God's invitation

to follow him in the new year. Amen +