



## St. John's Episcopal Church

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The Reverend David F. Sellery

*Priest-in-Charge*

Dear Friends,

One of the staples of the HGTV channel is the climactic moment in a home makeover show when the homeowners return to their renovated home to see the results of the professional “face lift” to their home. It is similar to the “MOVE THAT BUS!” moment on the show, *Extreme Makeover*, from a few years ago. There are usually tears of joy, gaping mouths of awe and surprise, and great waves of gratitude. No doubt about it, it is a real “feel good” moment to watch. So satisfying is this climactic moment, HGTV decided to create a series showing only those climactic moments, skipping all of the build-up and suspense, and going straight to the contrasting before and after shots of the remodeled house, and the great moment when the homeowners see the renewed space for the first time. The name of this new HGTV show is THE BIG REVEAL.

What is our fascination with these moments, these “big reveals?” Perhaps it is because the entire scope of work was conducted without any input or progress updates for the owners, who merely show up at the end to receive such an overwhelming gift. In real-life, extreme makeovers happen only through considerable sweat and cost, with a number of false starts and failed attempts along the way, a few bruises and scrapes, and a process that is agonizingly slow and tedious. But, at least for the TV show, THE BIG REVEAL, we can relish the wonderful dream that such a fabulous life-changing new life could just drop in our lap like a gift from heaven. Who wouldn't be lost in wonder and joy?

As we live more fully into the season of Epiphany, a set of Sundays devoted to the stories in scripture whereby God revealed His heart and His plan for humanity, especially through the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, our focus will be on the story of the Magi. These astrologers of the first century, who see a strange new star in the sky, and are so overcome with its meaning and significance they set out on a long journey from their homeland to Bethlehem in Judea, to worship the newborn king so important that the entire heavens would break forth into fireworks!

Indeed, a star was born in that lowly Bethlehem manger, but you would never know it just by looking at the baby, or his mother and Joseph. They did not glow in the dark, they did not have halos around their heads. They looked like just any other poor couple with a new baby. But despite the ordinary wrapping of this extraordinary baby,

*Praising God, Serving Neighbor*

God did not want to slip into human history incognito. So God announced the baby's birth in the most extremely visible way possible, with a new star shining bright over the heads of everyone on earth. God wrote the news across the entire sky, where everyone, absolutely everyone, could see it—if they only would.

Talk about a “Big Reveal”!

Don't you love the moment when the magi finally arrive before the Holy Family? They open their treasures, and give gifts completely inappropriate for a new baby (so maybe they were all men, after all!). Wouldn't it have been more useful if they had given gifts of diapers, formula, and a stroller? You can tell they hadn't been to many baby showers. And yet, they gave gifts that were valuable to them, and trusted that God would use the gifts in ways they could not imagine. Isn't that the way with all gifts and generosity offered to God? Our giving is born out of God's first generosity, coming to us even when we were expecting Him. Giving is a form of worship. And in the end, if we give a gift that matters to us, a big gift to us, it will be a big gift for God too, whether that gift is the gold and incense of a magi, or the humble praise of a shepherd.

God uses our gifts in ways we could never imagine or plan! And that too is just part of the Big Reveal!

Our Stewardship Program this year has been reoriented to focus more intently on the Sundays in Epiphany – and the gifts of the Magi ... and what gifts we too might bring to our common life at St. John's.

We want to again thank you for your wonderful response by increasing your pledge or gift, so we could meet our financial obligations for 2016. As we look ahead to what will come in 2017 we would like to ask that each of us use our 2016 pledge as a baseline to either maintain, or if possible, please pray about increasing your pledge for 2017. This will allow us to prepare a viable and sustainable budget for this year and the 2017 budget will become part of our five-year plan that we are required to prepare as we plan ahead with the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

The Vestry heard you loud and clear at the Crossroads meetings and heard your desire to continue to support a full-time ministry at St. John's for years to come. To make that happen we may have to make changes including reducing expenses, looking at potential shared ministries, and limiting our draw down of our endowment to no more than 5 percent. We also need your help in reducing our payment for clergy housing. If you have a property or know of a property that we can pursue as a gift or rent in Salisbury, please contact the Vestry and Wardens.

A pledge is an estimate of giving; some call it a statement of intent. Your pledge amount may be changed, increased or decreased during the year, any time as your financial circumstances change.

At St. John's, we know that financial stewardship is an important component of a balanced spiritual life. Returning to God from that which God has given us is a tangible way to express our faith. When each of us gives as we are able, together we fund ministry within our parish, to the local community, and to the world. Pledging allows you to make intentional decisions about your financial giving. Receiving your pledge allows our Vestry, the Church's governing board, to do for the parish community what you do for your household: "plan wisely for the use of our resources in support of the mission and ministry to which God has called us."

Thank you. We can do this! Your gift, like the gifts of the Magi, are essential to supporting our common life in Christ as we live it out at St. John's.

God love you!

The Clergy and Vestry, St. John's Church