



Skyspace: Seldom Seen by James Turrell, Photo by Jennifer Taverner

'We observed his star at its rising' Matthew 2.2

One of the permanent sculptures in the grounds of Houghton Hall in West Norfolk is by the American artist James Turrell. It is a simple square structure on stilts, accessed by a gently ascending path winding right round it to an open door. And there, unbidden by anything except instinct, a hush falls on even the most talkative. There is nothing inside the room. But also, somehow, immense promise and possibility. The wooden seat running around its four walls invites us to sit and lean back. And we notice for the first time the enormous square opening above which leaves us completely exposed - to the turning of day and night (dusk in this photo), to the weather, and to something powerful which stirs in us as we look up and through it.

Turrell's construction forces us to focus on the sky and, drenched with the wonder of that sky, and quieted by the requirement to pay it complete attention, we find ourselves in sacred space. We are in an observatory but also in a chapel. The similarities between prayer and star-gazing are strong. Both require us to stop and fall silent, to abandon ourselves to watching and waiting.

We know so little about Matthew's mysterious magi but their unswerving focus cannot be doubted. Their openness both to God and to scanning the skies leads to their obedient following of the sign of their times: a difficult journey follows, a dangerous encounter with a despot, and then, homeward-

bound, a last-minute change of direction. But within all that, what a discovery!

It is not always easy to follow a star. As the year turns in this fractured world, we would be wise men and women to try to read the signs of our times in the context of prayer, of watching and waiting upon God. Our current lostness and longing will lead to new discoveries, new responsibilities. Where will we be led this year? What will be *our* Epiphany?

"Those who follow the Creator of the stars often find themselves in the midst of an Epiphany, called to follow stars that may at first seem beyond their reach."

Macrina Wiederkehr

Prayer

**Give us, O God,
a steady eye and a stilled soul
with which to read
the signs of our times
and the courage to follow
wherever you lead.
Amen**