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## *Sand Dollars and Stars*

**An article for the Cathedral Times by Dean Sam Candler**

It's been almost a hundred years since the sand dollar looked like a dollar. Our dollars have turned from gold to silver, and from round discs to sheets of paper. Now, our dollars are figures on a check, or digits on a credit card, or maybe just a swipe of our smartphone.

But the "sand dollar" name persists. It is the name of a lovely shell, a skeleton, really, along the Atlantic coast, and in oceans around the world. Alive, the animal has little spikes, and thus is one of the echinoderm phylum of animals. The word "echinoderm" means "spiny-skinned." The sand dollars that I find on the beach are flaky gray discs, with a beautiful five-pointed star pattern on one side.

That five-pointed star pattern is a good clue that the sand dollar is actually related to the starfish, or what we call the starfish. The true name of the starfish (not a fish, per se) is the sea star.

At the Feast of the Epiphany, we in the Christian Church pause to celebrate a star. It was the sign of a star that led wise men from the east to be searching for the one who would be messiah and who would shepherd God's people. They found the child Jesus.

That star, and stars in general, continue to be signs for us of the light of the world. Somehow, stars indicate a mysterious and powerful light, light that comes to us not just in one line, but in various rays. Light radiating out from its core, in several rays, is what we call a star. Often, we give five rays to a star, but there are obviously so many more.

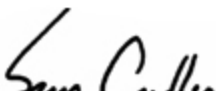
One of the features of sea stars is that when an arm, or ray, is broken off, another one grows in its place. Its body is able to regenerate. (Echinoderms are known for their radial symmetry.) Such is the power of star light, too. It is able to regenerate.

When we look for light in our lives, we are looking for something powerful enough to regenerate, powerful enough to touch us again and again. We may be looking for something spectacular and heavenly, but the true lights of the world can come from most anywhere. True lights of radiating mercy can come from right beside us, in someone we know. Or from someone we don't know. True lights of radiating mercy may even come from the ground below us, from the ocean mud and the sand.

True lights of radiating mercy can come to us in the form of a gray and flaking skeleton on the beach, a sand dollar. It may look like old currency, but there is something holy in it. It has carried the value of spirit in times past, and it can carry the value of spirit again.

During this season of Epiphany, I want to find the stars of heaven. Those stars may not be in the skies. They may be in the sandy beaches of our state. They may be in what the waves and water have washed up and left behind. With God, there is another chance. God wants to show us light, and God will regenerate that presence, again and again, if we need it.

I hope you find some of God's sand dollars this season. They won't buy you a thing at the shopping mall, but their value will be unsurpassed. They will have the ability to show us, again and again, that God's light and God's love are eternal.



Sam Lander

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