

Sermon for the Feast of the Epiphany
Sunday, January 6, 2019
Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes

Lovers, Stargazers, Are We!

Good morning, Reconcilers and a blessed new year! We are in the midst of a season of opening our hearts to the truth of how deeply God loves humanity and all creation that God becomes one of us. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, *"It was God-with-us. Not the God-up-there somewhere who answers our prayers by lifting us out of our lives, but the God who comes to us in the midst of them- however far from home we are, however less than ideal our circumstances, however much of little our lives reflect the Christmas cards we send. That is where God is born, just there, in any cradle we will offer him, on any pile of straw we will pat together with our hands."* Even in sometimes brokenness of a human heart, God will dwell.

And on this Sunday morning, we have the wondrous, mystical, joyous occasion to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. You know, the feast about which we sing, (join me...) (Ask choir to sing out the first verse... in lively fashion!)

We three Kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star
O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light!

And not only do we love singing that hymn, perhaps we have loved delighting in an Epiphany pageant, where those three Kings or Three Wise Ones are all bedecked in their finest royal garbs as they each process so very reverently with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh presented to the holy child... It's all too wondrous, isn't it? And these manger scenes of kings, camels, shepherds, angels, and stars have, over the years, buoyed our spirits, and sparked our faith in what might seem to some, to be a story too far-fetched to be true.

The truth of the matter is that when it comes to "We three kings...." Well, hold on, not so fast. So much has been made of this story of which we know almost nothing at all. In Matthew's gospel, which is the only one read on Epiphany in all three liturgical years, there are few details... Matthew does not say there were three Kings, in fact there is no mention of how many or what their station in life was, only that these were wise men, wise ones. The word used is "magi", the plural of "magus" which was often a contemptuous name for itinerant artists, musicians, and entertainers.

In his book, "Brightest and Best: A Companion to Lesser Feasts and Fasts", the author, Sam Portaro, an Episcopal priest, writes:

I rather like the notion that the magi might have been traveling artists and entertainers, members of a class commonly accepted as foolish, in every sense of the word. Of course, such a possibility radically alters the asymmetry of the crèche, where the exotically adorned kings nearly upstage everyone, including the Holy Family itself. In that regard, the magi are the most modern religious symbols, sympathetic icons of power and wealth that draw more attention than a child born in poverty...

There is something right about a troupe of wandering artists whose whim to follow a star brings them to the crude trough of a cradle of God-with-us, Emmanuel."

For me, the possibility that the magi were pretty simple people who noticed a blazing star in the sky and decided to follow its lead... is simply more compelling than any other I have been taught or have more naively believed.

In last Sunday's text from the Prologue of John Gospel, we heard these words:

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. **Everyone.** Drawn to that blazing light in the sky, drawn to the blazing Light of Love lying in a crude bed, most assuredly could be wandering artists, musicians, and entertainers, stargazers, and dreamers, like you and me.

You see, God did not need the kings, the powerbrokers of that world to make God's infinite and inclusive love to be made manifest in Jesus. And in our own day, we do not need the powerbrokers or politicians of our own day to lead the way to Love and to the transformation of this world by Love. On this feast day, the message is that the call, the vocation to Love is given to EVERYONE!

A brief story.

During our flight from Boston to Dublin, I had the good fortune (actually it was the generosity of Martha who offered me the seat by the window. And as we made our way through the thick cloud banks, we rather mystically climbed into the absolute darkness of the sky surrounded by the light of "galaxies, suns, and the planets in their courses." The scene took my breath away. It was a starlit sky and oh, yes, there were stars ablaze. I sat in silence and in awe feeling as if this was heaven and

earth meeting. This was silent night, holy night. This was what St. Exupery described in *The Little Prince*:

In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them, I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars will be laughing when you look at the sky at night. You, only you, will have the stars that can laugh. And when your sorrow is comforted, you will be content that you have known me.

Silent night. Holy night... indeed. And I felt the presence of my sister in the stars God had set in that sky, that night. And I was more deeply content than ever that I have been, loved by the Creator of those stars whose comfort heals our hearts and lifts our spirits.

You see, I, too, love the possibility that there were NO kings on a way to the stable to leave magnificent treasures in a crude stable of a holy child. I am profoundly grateful that whether those ancient ones were stargazers, dreamers, wandering musicians, artists, and entertainers, in the mere noticing of a blazing star, and in the leap of faith that somehow came of their meandering ways, they, too, like the dreamer, stargazer, and often time, wanderer that I am can find my way home to Jesus.

That his light of Love as St. John so eloquently and powerfully put it... is the light of all people, the light that enlightens everyone, the lover, the reconciler, the stargazer, dreamer, and wanderer in all of us... for eternity.

I will leave you with this little tune for your week's journey as we enter the season of Epiphany, the manifestation of Light and Love ablaze for all people.

Show the Youtube of *The Rainbow Connection* sung by Sarah Mclaughlin

What's so amazing that keeps us stargazing? What do we think we will see?

I believe it is that Star still ablaze that enlightens everyone's way, the way of Love for the stargazer and dreamer in each of us.

May you choose to look up, notice, and follow the Light of Love this day and always. As you invite others to find and follow it, too.

Amen.