

“Seeing the Child”

Isaiah 60:1 – 5, Matthew 2:1 – 12

To begin with, this is not a “listen-to-the preacher” sermon. You are invited to join in this sermon. Take out that little piece of paper in your bulletin, and be ready to go deeper into the scripture, to imagine, and to see the child, along with the Magi.

The prophet Isaiah wrote: “Get out of bed, Jerusalem! Wake up. Put your face in the sunlight. God’s bright glory has risen for you.”

I suppose there are many places on earth that are calling for sunlight today, and not simply the sunlight from the sun. As the New Year begins, so many places are in darkness, and some of us here know that darkness well- whether the darkness is inside of us, blocking the way to our heart, or whether the darkness is outside of us – a life not what we had wanted or imagined for our selves, another year passing without new hope. And this message to Jerusalem, that fated city, still the center of the world in so many ways, that beautiful, beautiful, ancient, ancient city – the heart and soul of so many faiths – asks Jerusalem to wake up. Jerusalem, then, like now, is calling for sunlight. So many times its ancient gates have seen blood and not the sun. How many people this morning are lying in bed, afraid to arise, afraid of the blood they will see this day? “Put your face in the sunlight.”

There is no where better on earth to learn a way to turn your face in the sunlight than here in church. That’s true. The most practical part of ourselves will never see this, will think that what we have here is only foolishness; but then, only the foolish part of ourselves will not live in faith.

The three wise ones had certainly woke up. Following that star, they faced into the sunlight. Following that star, they ascertained that their practical nature was not enough to learn how to live again. Following that star, and laying aside all practical intents, they knew exactly how to talk to that cunning Herod, to lay him aside, trusting themselves, trusting that Star, following the signs.

We have lost so much in our postmodern world. We lost so much, so long ago. We have lost the ability to trust in our deeper instincts, those messages from our guts, from our bodies, that speak so much more clearly and honestly than our minds. We, too, have fallen in the night and are unable to put our faces into the sunlight.

But this is a New Year. If you are growing in your faith, you know that this New Year promises more than a time for new resolutions, as helpful as they might be. If you are growing in faith, you know that this New Year gives you the chance to lay aside your maps and your GPS, and instead, to follow the star to the child.

So let’s begin, together, in worship, today. Let’s return to the ancient ways whose knowledge is still part of us. I am going to invite you to enter the scripture about the coming of the Magi to the child in a different way. Through the ages, people have lived into the scriptures in many ways. There are many ways to embrace the stories, to enter the stories. So often, we think the only way is to know the history, or to know the meanings of the words. Again, we are practical people.

But there is deeper truth in the story than we can know with our rational minds. There is our imagination, our ability to live and breathe into the ancient story, to become part of the story. And if we can do that today, we will have seen the child.

So put your feet flat on the floor. If you have books or papers or a purse in your hands, put them on the floor, too. Then, settle into those nice green chairs. I know they are comfortable, for I often come to sit here in the sanctuary to meditate or to pray. Every single time, I think about how comfortable those chairs are!

For a moment, feel your heart beating! See, nothing to do! Only listen, and watch the movement of the story as if you were an observer, standing close to the three wise men, smelling them, hearing them speak, watching their eyes. Ready?

Let's go! Let's enter the story!

Read slowly, Matthew 2:1-12.

Now, as you stand there with the Wise Men, gazing at the child in the arms of Mary, his mother, search your heart for a moment. What great longing to you have inside of you today? What hope have you yet to know in your life? What wish do you have for yourself? What are you holding on to that you want to surrender to God?

Take a few moments to ponder these things, then speak them, aloud or in your heart, to that child, in the arms of Mary, his mother.

Gather yourself together now! Find your hymnal and find that little lavender piece of paper. Write that longing in your heart. If you like, you might begin: "Dear God..." But that doesn't matter. Simply find the words to express your deepest hope, your deepest dream on this day, January 1, 2012.

"I love Jesus, who said to us
Heaven and earth will pass away.
When heaven and earth have passed away,
my word will remain.
What was your word, Jesus?
Love? Affection? Forgiveness?
All your words were
one word: Wakeup." ---Antonio Machado