

A Wise Gift

New Year, New Outlook: Part 1 “A Wise Gift”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – January 9, 2022

Epiphany Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-15

Reflection: Psalm 72

Greeting: In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. (*John 1*)

Prayer: Eternal God, you have given us the greatest of joy through the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Your light has broken into the darkness and your love has been made known to us. Let us sing your praises and glorify your name. Let your hope guide our hearts in all that we are and all that we do, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 72

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service. For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long. May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy. (Psalm 72:1-17 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 72 and hear of God's justice. That the king should have God's will in his sights. That we are called to continually call on God to guide us and lead us. What do you see as your call for God's justice? Do you look for ways to show God's love to others? Do you seek ways to share in God's generosity? How do you share in the joy of God's gifts for you?

Prayer: O Lord, we celebrate the home we have in your gracious love. Let this new year be a time we reflect on your mercy and grace, of your gift of salvation. May we share in your justice and righteousness. We are thankful that we may lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you hear the earnest plea of our hearts. We pray that your light and love bring peace to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 60 verses 1 through 6.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 2 verses 1 through 15.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to

Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matthew 2:1-15 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This Sunday we celebrate Epiphany, where we look at the visit of the Magi, the coming of wise men bringing gifts upon Christ's birth. And I actually extended this reading a little from where it usually stops. I will get to why in just a moment. But with our reading today we see visitors come and they are following the star to try to find the newborn king. They come to Herod, and this frightens Herod. And the reason it frightens him is because a king would upset his rule. A new king of Israel would disrupt everything that gives him power. So, Herod calls together experts because he's got a plan. They check and the prophets said that he was born in Bethlehem of Judea. So, Herod calls for the wisemen, figures out when the star appeared, and then sent them on to Bethlehem saying that he hopes they'll come back so that he too can honor this newborn king. And so, they set out and they find Jesus with Mary and they offer up gifts. Now one of the things that may throw us off about this is that they don't find him in the midst of traveling away from home. It's not that they come, and they follow shortly after shepherds. That is Luke's account. Matthew's account doesn't have an inn or shepherds or heavenly choirs singing. They find them seemingly at home. And we don't know exactly how old Jesus is at this point, but we can assume that he's getting close to being about two, and that's because of what follows. But the traveling wisemen offer up gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This echoes our reading from Isaiah about nations coming to the light and that they shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord. Here they are bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They are praising the newborn king. And then the wise men are warned in a dream. Don't come back the way you came. Don't return to Herod. Go home. And so, by another road they head home. Where that home is we don't know.

Now this is usually where our reading ends. But I wanted to go a step further. Because there's another dream we need to know about. Because Joseph has a dream and is warned to get out as well. "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And so, by night, Joseph gathers up his little family and they flee to Egypt. I end on that point because it's a bit of a different point than what we'd usually land on with this story. Because we really love to celebrate the gifts and how the wisemen come and they honor Christ, and we don't always recognize the fleeing. The fear that comes with this visit. Parents desperate to save the life of their child head off to a foreign land as refugees. And I've always pondered how important those gifts became. Because offering up gold and frankincense and myrrh, they aren't cheap things. Those are things that would be worth at least a good value and I've always wondered if

that funded there is escape their ability to get to Egypt and start a new life while waiting to come home. It could be I'm reading too much into it, as each gift has a symbolic value as well, but the thought always strikes me. The story quickly becomes a story about the kindness of strangers offering someone a new chance, a new hope. Because it's easy to imagine that it would not be an easy trip to make. They wouldn't be able to take much with them. But maybe because of these strangers who came to honor this newborn king, they have a chance.

They were right to flee of course. The story following this is of Herod killing the children in Bethlehem. And so, as I thought about this Epiphany story, I started to think about the importance of being able to help others in that way. And I've been thinking about how we reach out to others and how we show Christ to others in this new year. This made me think about the wisemen in an interesting way because we don't get a lot of information about them other than they followed a star to honor a new king. A group of foreigners coming to say that there is a new King of the Jews in the land. One might wonder just how much of a threat it would be. But one of the things that happens in Matthew is that when they refer to him as King of the Jews, they're giving him a title that would put him at odds with everyone in power. The King of the Jews couldn't be a subject of Rome. If there's a King of the Jews, Herod isn't the ruler of Judea. If there is a king, those in power have plenty to be afraid of. And what we see is all too familiar in our reading today: those in power do everything they can to keep power. And that's echoed throughout the gospel. Because it's one of the fears that drives everything that happens. From Christ's birth through his death, the idea of somebody challenging the existing power is too much. And what would people do to keep that power? As we see in Matthew, anything. Tricking visitors from a foreign land into giving away the child's location so Herod could kill him. And it came back to me just how important the kindness of these strangers was. Bringing gifts, honoring him, helping him.

So, one of the important things that I note in this story is the importance of reaching out to help others as part of our evangelism. Because it's one thing to say that we want to help those in need, but it's another to actually go and do it. To recognize the situations that they're in. The Epiphany story reminds me of how many people are still fleeing for the safety of their family from dangerous, desperate situations. Now, one might ask how it's an act of evangelism, to fight for the safety of others. I know I have colleagues that would say, "Well, you're not talking about Christ when you talk about that, so that can't be evangelism." And I would say that they're completely wrong. Because it's hard to hear the good news when you are afraid for your life. It is hard to hear about God's love when you are worried about the safety of the people that you love most. However, people recognize an act of great love and want to know where it comes from. That if we show people the love of Christ, through our charity, through our help, and through our activism, they will recognize the Holy Spirit acting. When people see others fighting for justice, not just for themselves, but just disparate others then they will see why as well. And for me, it can only be an act of evangelism to want to help refugees, when our

Savior was a refugee in need of help of others to survive. It can only be an act of evangelism to help those in need when our Savior was in desperate need of help.

And so, this year I challenge you to rethink what it means to bear witness to Christ. To think about all the things that we can do, that Christ wants us to do. That our actions point to him because of our love and not just because of our words. That we point to Jesus because of our actions in his name, and not just proclaiming his name. That if we are of one body redeemed by one blood, we show it by showing love to the people that we know God loves. In this new year, may we show all those we can God's love through our actions. Let it be a gift that we give wisely and we give generously, and let our actions proclaim the love of our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – New Year, New Outlook

We follow up our Christmas series with a look at the new year and how we can reach out. What does evangelism look like? What should it look like?

January 9th – A Wise Gift – Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-15

January 16th – The Spirit Descends – Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

January 23rd – The Light of Home – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

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