

Sermon: Searching for Jesus

Scripture: John 1:1-5, 10-14; Matthew 2:1-12

January 3, 2021

Second Sunday of Christmas / Celebrating Epiphany of the Lord

Christian Ko Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Our Gospel text on the tenth day of Christmas looking toward Epiphany is Matthew chapter 2, verses 1-2. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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.

Our second reading comes from gospel of John 1:1-12. John reminds us who Jesus was, is, and is to come in the opening sentences of his book. Placing Jesus back prior to the creation of the world and Genesis 1:1, John's prologue foretells of his emphasis of Christology – that Jesus is fully divine and fully human.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being. What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Holy God, as we expound on your life-giving Word, help us to open our heart and mind to trust your mystery that transcends all our comprehension. May we be given an extra measure of grace this year as we start with new resolutions and hopes. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer.

Happy New Year everyone! Around the world, people welcomed the new year with bright ideals, hope, and new opportunities for the coming year. Like many years before, cities announced the new year by painting the night sky with colorful fireworks and its thunderous explosions. It is true that this year's celebrations were muted a bit due to COVID and some of us are not as thrilled or excited about the new year due to lack of progress that are being made to get back to the norm or as close as we can to the pre-COVID days. But these New Year celebrations were good reminder for all of us that we need to proclaim the good news of the Lord by radiating God's marvelous light and love into this dark, pandemic stricken, grieving, less-hope filled world.

Today's Matthew passage shares with us the story of the wise men surrounded by mystery. Matthew retells the story of their journey with many blanks and ambiguities that we come up with more questions than what is being told. Such as where are they from exactly? How many were there? How old was Jesus when they worshipped him? Why were they chosen? I look forward to answering these questions when Diana grows up and correcting many wrong depictions of who they were on Christmas cards and stories, since she and I completed the Nativity sticker book which included three wise men and their camels kneeling before the baby Jesus laying in the manger just last week!

As we welcome the new dawn of 2021, we are once again surrounded by the mystery and uncertainty of what the year might bring. Year 2020 was an extraordinary year which forced many of us to come out of complacency and routine to readdress how we live our lives. Some of its difficulties are being carried over to the new year, although we have much more hope of getting through it. It is in our human nature to seek out an answer for all the things that are taking place around us, and some use it as a basis to seek God or to reject God whenever disasters or tragedies takes place. Similarly, in today's Scripture, we find a similar situation of a person rejecting the king of the Jews while another group searches for him. Although we maybe couple thousand years removed from the story and the circumstances might be different, the effects that has on us are the same. Therefore, let us take a closer look into the story and look for points that are relevant to our lives today.

When the news of a newborn king of Jews reaches the ears of King Herod, we can observe the rejection of Messiah. He was already a king over Jerusalem. There cannot be two kings on the throne, and it is logical that he must have taken this news of new king being born as a threat to his power and authority. As he invites the wise men and asks them to continue the search for Jesus, one can clearly see that he had an ulterior, evil motive behind that request. Rather than assisting them finding a Messiah or joining the wise men in the search for Jesus,

he does not take any active role to seek out the promised child. Quick food for thought is do I have anything, big or small, that prevents or hinders me from seeking Jesus in my life?

Contrast to King Herod are the wise men, foreigners who probably did not know of Jewish stories and traditions as outsiders. They have been, however, studying and traveling after the star in search for whom they believed to be the next king of the Jews. Maybe because they believed that this star was an omen to the birth of new king of Jews, they went to the King Herod's palace, thinking there would be an heir. But the new king was not there. Probably confused and disappointed about their long journey so far, they must have experienced tidal waves of emotions running through them until they saw the same star that brought them to this foreign land leading them once again. Even the wise men experienced this saying: "God may disappoint you, but God will never fail nor forsake you." They thought they had figured it out by visiting Herod, but they were wrong. Plans and looking for ways to celebrate their accomplishment vanished in front of them. It was not the ending they were looking for.

So, they must have continued asking about the new born king of the Jews, as they followed the star which started to leading them after they left Herod's palace. They continued searching and seeking for the Messiah, whom they believed not only welcomes the Jews but all, not realizing that they, too, would be saved and their eternity secured. Then on that faithful night when the star stood still, they were hearts were overjoyed as they knocked on the door and it was opened for them to see and worship baby Jesus.

Are we searching for Jesus in our lives? What is your star, a sign and marker, to lead you in your search for Jesus? For the wise men, it was through researching and following a star. Is it for you to care for the least of these – the hungry, the lost, the sick and the wounded? Or is it to build and maintain church and temple of the Lord, like Solomon did? Is it through your being a bringer of the good news as the prophets have done? Or is it to trust in God's Word as the centurion did asking Jesus to heal his servant at home?¹ Wise men has shown us that every vocation can lead us to finding Jesus, when we seek him. But their story does not end there.

Their joy turned into gratitude, and gratitude led to giving gift to honor him. In our pursuit of Jesus, God creates a deeper, intimate relationship with us, mending a bond that nothing on earth and in heaven can separate. As we are in God's presence in worship and when we humble ourselves to let the mystery and majesty of God reign in our hearts, we can experience the same awesome and mighty love of God that will fill us from within which will overflow and never runs dry. It will permanently change us and allows us to be used for God's will. As the Magi returned home, they returned in a different route as God illuminated a new path before them.

¹ Matthew 8:5-13

All of us are on our spiritual journey like these wise men. As we transition from Christmastime to a season of lights – Epiphany, let us plan year 2021 loosely and not be taken by surprise with bumps on the way. Come what may, may we continue our search for Jesus in our lives, and lean on the mystery of the Holy Spirit to lead us to shine God’s glorious light to the ends of the earth. Amen.