

Sermon for Trinity Lutheran, Eau Claire 1/5/2020

Matthew 2: 1-12 Celebration of Epiphany

Pr. Mary Kaye Ashley

Christmas & Epiphany joy & peace to you, and all those you love, and all those, even, that you don't love, on this day when we celebrate the epiphany – the showing of Jesus. Amen!

Two very vivid pictures stick in my awareness as we celebrate this day of the wise men's visit to Jesus after following the star. Maybe something like these impact your Epiphany celebration, too.

The first was a live, in person visit with my grandchildren, and their parents. A lovely artificial tree has decorated their apartment, with glass bulbs and tinsel, but the cats' and the children's occasional batting at the glass bulbs, (I don't know, maybe they were plastic), and 14 month old Amara's continuing to pull off tinsel and try to eat it meant that this week, following Christmas, their mommy had had enough of the tree. Because it is artificial, it collapses and is stored in a large bin in their storage closet for the rest of the year.

As my son, Matt, began to take the tree apart for storage, 3 ½ year old Declan threw himself on the floor, yelling, "Daddy, don't take my tree, don't put away my Christmas tree!" Matt reassured him that it would be safe, and that they would have it for next Christmas, but Declan was simply not ready for Christmas to be over. I wonder if there aren't some in this room who are equally not prepared to move on to the next thing in the year.

And the other vivid memory, and my apologies up front to those of you too young or too old or who maybe have better taste than to have seen the movie Talladega Nights, The Ballad of Ricky Bobby, first released in 2006, starring Will Farrell as a particularly arrogant NASCAR driver, who truly needs to learn some humility – and someone comes along to teach him.

But the scene that sticks in my mind is Ricky Bobby leading grace before a meal with his family and friends, and he insists that he can address his prayer to whichever version of Jesus he likes best and for him, that's the Christmas season's baby Jesus. Ricky begins ***"Dear 8 pounds 6 ounces... newborn infant Jesus, don't even know a word yet."*** The prayer goes on to hilarious lengths as Ricky

describes this infant version of Jesus he sees in his head. The scene only gets funnier when Ricky also insists Jesus had blonde hair and blue eyes. I wonder why the infant Jesus is so attractive to Ricky to talk to, and I have to wonder if it is because talking to, and giving direction to the Lord of the universe would not fit his view of himself.

I wonder if sometimes we are so much more comfortable with the vulnerable & miraculous infant, because at that moment, Jesus isn't asking very much of us. And if this helps us draw close to this Jesus, so be it. At least as a start.

King Herod of Jerusalem is very concerned when he hears of this baby born to be king, he even consults the chief priests and scribes of the people subjugated to Roman rule to ask, "Where is this Messiah to be born?" When he is told Bethlehem, he sends these wise men to find this infant/toddler king, and in the following chapter of Matthew, when the wise men return by another way, King Herod is furious about being tricked, and orders the death of every child under 2 years, about how old he determines Jesus would be by the time he has learned all this. For all sorts of reasons, we will skip over this part of the story and move on to the baptism of Jesus next week, but some things about the account we read today bear significant reflection:

This baby Jesus is born of humble beginnings. Everyone didn't know who he was, but the magi/the wise ones followed the star, and overcame significant challenges for a higher purpose – to meet this king. That star was for them – and for us – the beginning of a bright journey. The wise travelers knelt down & worship this young child, and brought him gifts of great value. Something happened here that is life-changing, and it has and can change our lives, too.

How are we most comfortable approaching Jesus, and what does that say about us? Henry David Thoreau once said, "The question is not what you look at, but what do you see?" What do you see? Where do you see God's kingdom in this world? Is it possible that God is still doing new things in our day and time, and if this child is born for us, what does the baby Jesus who becomes the toddler king greeted by wise ones, who becomes the Savior who dies for you and I, celebrated in the meal we will share in a few minutes, what does this Jesus want of us?

While I certainly don't claim to know all the answers, here are some of my wonderings: what new thing is God trying to birth in your life, and in the life of Trinity Lutheran in 2020? Where can we see God as we look around our world? Are there babies & parents of babies who need our support & protection today and tomorrow? Does what we've been sure we're to be about as worshippers of this God lock us into doing things the way we've always done them, worshipping the style we always have, giving gifts the way we have made it our habit? I'm NOT saying that those things are wrong, but I am saying that it is to our benefit, and to the benefit of everyone else Jesus loves to be open to how God might grow us. I don't believe that change for the sake of change serves us as disciples, but I also don't think that not being open to growth and learning serves anyone.

In closing, I'd like to share a blessing posted by a friend for this new year of faith. I don't know if she wrote it, or someone else did, but I hear call in it – from the baby Jesus, from the King of Kings worshipped, from the God who loves you. This baby, this child, grows to be a king very different from the way we think of kings. May we follow this One for all of our lives.

“A blessing – The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but” God's “love. May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone. Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor. May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is” as “a sacrament. Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love. May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you. And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire, that your love,” God's love in you “changes everything.”

May the light of the Epiphany star fill us, and show us, bring us to God, and send us where God wants us. Amen.”