

On Wonder

Epiphany - January 2/5, 2011

Matthew 2:1-9

This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the brightness of the Bethlehem star, the curiosity of the wise men and the grace of the One born Prince of Peace be with you always.

Ten days ago a record number of people came to this place of worship filled with the warmth and anticipation of Christmas. Candles flickered, the poinsettias were red and fresh, families smiled, the music was heavenly and the children looked like angels. It was a glorious celebration of Christmas. The best.

But it's been over a week since Christmas eve and some of you are happy to be tossing out the tree, packing up the decorations and moving along into a new season. Most people I listened to this week admitted they're happy that Christmas came - and went.

The Bible reading this day doesn't let us push along the calendar too quickly and leave Christmas behind so fast. Today's reading is about the Epiphany, which in a quainter time in American society marked the end of the 12 days of Christmas.

Today we read the story of Epiphany which comes 12 days after Christmas. Epiphany means "appearance" and celebrates the encounter of the Wise Men and Jesus. It's a story that snags our imagination and draws us back to a sense of wonder that marked our lives and the holiday 10 days ago. I hope this story might inspire some of the same feelings that marked the recent Christmas and provide you a sense of wonder for God.

Some quick history about the wise men. Their business was to read the sky - so upon the birth of Jesus they noticed a new star appeared. In the first century world, stars were believed to announce the birth of important people - usually royalty. So when the wise men saw this new star, it prompted many questions: "What new significant leader has been born? To what royal family? Where was he born? What kind of new king will he be? The wise men could not answer the questions.

So they followed the new star which led them to Jerusalem. There they checked in with a king named Herod. They thought he should know if a new royal family member had been born. Herod was a mean and selfish king and this curiosity of the wise men made him very nervous. If a new king had been born - it could mean trouble for Herod. So Herod, ever the conniving guy - told the wise men to follow the star and when they found the One they were looking for, to come back and report, so that he too, could go and worship the newborn king. But Herod wasn't telling the truth - what he really wanted to do was to destroy this baby born to be king. He wanted no rival to his throne.

Well, the wise men left Herod and followed the night star to Bethlehem. The Bible tells us “When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.” Then, inside a house they found the baby and his parents and they worshiped him.

The wise men brought gifts of precious minerals to the baby, but I am thinking they brought another kind of gift that was very precious, a gift of far more value than gold, frankincense and myrrh. The wise men brought the gift of wonder. It was wonder that motivated them in the first place.

Have you thought about where in your life is a sense of wonder? This story prompts me to view wonder as a gift to inspire our faithful living. Wonder, it motivated those wise men to find the new born King and worship him. Wonder — it can motivate us to reach toward the future God unfolds. Wonder – it can fuel us with faith, hope and love for the living of our days.

How is your sense of wonder these days? Famous poet D.H. Lawrence called wonder the most precious element in life, he named it our sixth sense. “When all comes to all, the most precious element in life is wonder. Love is a great emotion, and power is power, but both love and power are based on wonder.”

Thinking about the people in this Bible story - we see that:

- King Herod went for power —
- Joseph and Mary might have said the most important element in life is love —
- But the wise men teach us that to be able to get on that road toward the sacred, we need a sense of wonder.

Wonder holds gratitude and awe together. Wonder is the ability to be caught off guard and startled by the beauty, the power, the awesome nature of God.

The philosopher Aristotle said that philosophy, -- the ability to ask questions about the world, begins with a sense of wonder. So does spirituality — our faith in God.

Czeslaw Milosz, was a Polish poet, Nobel prize winner and professor at U Calf Berkeley. He lived in Warsaw during the Nazi occupation. He survived many tragedies in his life. But wonder did something for him in the midst of many great trials. He wrote that life is pure beauty and blessing and that even in the midst of bitterness and confusion: “Wonder kept dazzling me and I recall only wonder.” He found wonder in the world around him to inspire his faith and awareness of God. “Wonder keeps dazzling me!” How often does wonder dazzle you in the midst of challenges?

Wonder inspired the wise men to find baby Jesus, to give gifts and to worship him. They were dazzled with the wonder of God come to earth. They were dazzled by the wonder of God providing a sacred pathway to something better.

Have you been dazzled with wonder this Christmas - over the truth that God has come to earth? How might wonder inspire your faithful living this year? I believe the wonder of God in this new year can transform the ordinariness of life and provide for us a sacred pathway to something better, too.

The new year starts and the Christian church serves up the wise men to us to remind us to see the wonder of God. I hope you'll sense wonder over the truth of God's love for you; Wonder over the amazing grace that you are forgiven in Christ; Wonder over the promise from Jesus that there is a place prepared for you when life on this earth is done.

So my friends - GO! Go with wonder into the new year ahead. Go into each day with wonder. May your daily living let the whole world know the wonder of life in God. Amen.