



Camrose United Church

Sunday December 27, 2020

January 3, 2021

Faith stories untold.

Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's

presence in our community.

Entering Worship

Holy God,

Whose love created the world,

Whose patience is beyond our comprehension

Whose spirit quickens our hearts and souls

and makes us whole

as we revisit stories of our faith,

open our hearts and minds to

your message for us today.

May we continue to live and learn one moment at a time.

Amen.

This time that we find ourselves in – between Christmas and Epiphany – is a time when we often are gathering with family. In those gatherings we celebrate love. We celebrate those who are important to us. We start making plans for the future (those New Years resolutions we love so much!) And we know that God enjoys our togetherness as much as we do.

But in this time of the church there are some important stories that often don't get told. They are stories of faith, of believing, of changing directions, of courage and the grounding for empathy—a much needed emotion when living with others. Here are some of those stories:

Luke 2:22-40 *Common English Bible*

22 When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (It's written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.") They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what's stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Simeon's response to Jesus

25 A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said,

29 "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word because my eyes have seen your salvation. You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel."

33 His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too."

Anna's response to Jesus

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years.

She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Jesus as a child in Nazareth

39 When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

Reflection

Around January 1st we might hear the story of Jesus' Circumcision which is truly a story of faithfulness: the Jewish Law was that males would be circumcised eight days after birth during a Brit milah ceremony, at which they are also officially given their name.

Hear in this story the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph as they follow the tenants of their Jewish faith. Their gifts of the turtle doves or pigeons identifies them as a family with little means – but that they gave what they could to God. See Simeon a man of great faith who recognized in the small 8-day old child, the coming of God. See Anna a woman, a prophet, of great age who also recognized the Holy in the child. Hear God's faithfulness promises given and kept: to Simeon who had been promised a glimpse of the Messiah; to Anna who knew God's voice was rewarded with seeing Jesus; to Mary and Joseph who had acted with such faith and now received affirmations that they were blessed. Have you lived your faith as passionately as they did? Have you recognized God's faith and promises kept with you?

January 6th is the day of Epiphany. Epiphanies are sudden realizations and new understandings of ordinary occurrences – aha moments. We often see them with brilliant lights (or stars) and as a gift from God with the power to transform our living.

Matthew 2:1-12 *New Revised Standard Version*

The Visit of the Wise Ones

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, Magi 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:

6 ‘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.’”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the Magi 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.

11 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.

Reflection

You may have noticed that in our Christmas story I didn't include the Magi or 'Wise Ones'. That's because their story comes around on Epiphany when we celebrate that, led by the light of a star, these members of a priestly caste in ancient Persia and Babylon who interpreted signs using astrology, astronomy and dreams, and offered political and military advice to powerful kings, found God's greatest gift and their experience took them on a detour and, subsequently, the Holy Family too.

In this story we might notice
that the Magi are looking for a child – not a baby,
that they find the family in a house – not a stable
that they follow their gut and, of course the spirit, and avoid
returning to speak to a man who was unpredictable, violent,
paranoid and untrustworthy.

This aha story asks us to explore
The possibilities that the Magi took their time arriving
possibility meeting the Christ child as a toddler,
That not everyone we meet is to be trusted,
God will help us choose if we will listen.
The story of the magi humbling themselves before a child
was an Epiphany moment for many new believers.

Another story we miss that I think is so very important to hear is the flight to Egypt.

Matthew 2:13-23 *Common English Bible*

Escape to Egypt

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

Murder of the Bethlehem children

16 When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

18 A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much grieving.

Rachel weeping for her children,
and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.

Return from Egypt

19 After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. “Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there.

Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

Reflection

Following the non-return of the Magi, Herod reacted in fury. Once Herod realized that he had been deceived by the Wise Ones he went on a rampage. He ordered the death of male children age 2 years and under in Bethlehem. Herod was known for his ruthlessness, having had one wife and two of his sons and his political rivals killed. In his final years, his paranoia was infamous. His remaining sons were no less violent.

Joseph and Mary were warned in a dream to get out and go to Egypt with the child until those seeking his life were dead. There is much speculation about how long Mary, Joseph and Jesus stayed in Egypt. Somewhere around 2 ½ years appears to be a reasonable guess. There are faith stories about the travelling, homeless, Holy Family in Egyptian legends.

We don't hear this story often, this story of a poor family fleeing instability and becoming refugees which is another example of God with those in the most challenging of life circumstances. I wonder why.

Does it come too close to home for those who have lived with violence?

Does it challenge us to really consider what would we do in such circumstances?

In these stories of faith that can often get lost in our post-Christmas moments, there is wisdom to be shared.

Wisdom of faith, of patience, of trust.

Wisdom in choices, in listening.

They teach us that the world isn't always a safe place and that somewhere, sometime, somehow we may be called upon to shelter the Holy, to recognize the Holy, to be the Holy for God and with God.

Scripture Reading

Scripture is our song for the journey, passed on from generation to generation to guide and inspire.

**God calls us to be doers of the word
and not hearers only**

How is God speaking to you in these stories today?
Now that you have heard them, what can you do with them?

God of great faithfulness,
We give you thanks that you continue to open our hearts to love in the world.

We give you thanks for the reminders we hear that faith is engaging with you and for you.

We give you thanks for these reminders that, when we lament our troubles, you have truly lived them with us, and understand us and love us through them.

**We are reminded that you are with us. We are not alone
Thanks be to you, O God.**

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth, showing us where we are and where we are meant to be.

The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us wherever we go.

☞Sending Song: Wexford Carol.

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Acknowledgements

Bible Sprout - Bible Study Tools to Grow Christian Faith

<https://goodquestionblog.com>

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