A.M.D.G. Epiphany Sunday - C Text: Matthew 2: 1-12

 January 6, 2019

**Matthew 2: 1-12:** 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.

**We Cannot Do What We Cannot Imagine**

Did you ever wonder what happened to the Magi when they went back home? Did they live happily ever after? Were their lives changed in any way by what they had seen and experienced on their journey to the Christ Child? After having followed the dream - and seen the wonder and mystery at the centre of the Christmas event ..... after all that - did it make a difference when they got back home and had to do all the mundane things of ordinary life - like take out the garbage, balance the checkbook, pay the bills, attend meetings, and all the other thousand and one things that crowd our ordinary existence?

And after the anticipation and the celebration and the wonder of the holy night - after we have been to the manger, and found *our* way home once again - does it really matter for ***us***? Or do we just pack it all away again for another year? Does Christmas make a difference? For when its time to drag out the tree, straighten up the house, and get back to school and work once again - are we not like the Magi going back home to their own country? In the midst of our old routines, and getting back to ‘*normal*’ - do we not long to carry with us some sense of wonder and possibility and hope that Christmas inspires in us - even if we have to go back to a world that Christmas doesn’t seem to have changed much - if at all.

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We live in a world which seems at times to have all the wonder drained away. We tend to have insulated and isolated ourselves from wonder - from imagination - from mystery. But I think that is precisely why Christmas speaks to us at such a deep level. In the midst of our technological, mechanical and scientific world, we find our souls unsatisfied and our hearts yearning for something more. At the deepest level of our being, we long for mystery. We yearn for that which is greater than ourselves, for that which reaches beyond our human grasp, for that which gives our lives meaning and hope.

As we experience the moral poverty of almost all the current political, social and economic systems; as we watch powerless as international violence and terrorism explode in our world; as we listen to the macho manipulation of the world’s leaders playing with nations and people’s lives like pieces in a chess game - we sometimes have a sense that the world is out of control and reeling toward some hideous nightmare. And we yearn to *dream*, to recapture the mystery and wonder - to follow the star that will lead us forward with hope.

It was Albert Einstein who once said, “*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.*” And it is that *mystery*, that *wonder*, that capacity to *dream* that we celebrate through the story of the Magi at Epiphany.

Being warned in a dream, the Magi decided to go back home by another way. And so can we. We can resist the Herods of our time who try to trick us into the subtle cynicism of believing that wonder and dreams and imagination are only for children. Contemporary Herods are all those people, institutions and cultural assumptions that kill the wonder in us all. They are the ones who say “It can’t be done ... There is no way .... you must never take a chance ... everything you do must be useful and efficient ... playing is wasteful .... dreams are worth nothing.” But we can **choose** not to listen - and to actively seek for ways that will open us to the wonder of life and God’s presence in it.

You might, for example, take a course in watercolour painting, or get season tickets to the symphony or the theatre. You might start a Gratitude journal and use it at night to thank God for all the blessings of the day. You might write down every question you ever had or were afraid to let yourself ask - not to search for answers, but to live with the mystery of the questions. In short, we can decide to pay more attention to all of life. We can choose to listen more to the silence. We can stop and take a deep breath. We can pray more. And we can decide not to be so hurried that we rush through life unaware - not even noticing the star that beckons for our attention.

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A bishop recently returned from a trip to Africa where he had discussed the issue of ordaining women with African bishops who were opposed to the idea. He made the following observation: *“Their objections seemed to be less theologically based that I had supposed. It was more that they could not imagine a woman in that role. They cannot do what they cannot imagine.”*

**We cannot do what we cannot imagine**. Dreams and wonder are not meant to be packed away with all the other Christmas trimmings. They are the gifts of Christmas that we carry with us into the days ahead. In the face of all cynicism and despair - they are what inspire us to dream God’s dream for our world. Like the Magi of old, we can defy the Herod voices of our day by going home from Christmas by another way. Epiphany is about following the dream, and imagining new possibilities - and then working together to make them a reality.

2019 is going to be an interesting year for this congregation at Lakeview Multicultural. There is the building redevelopment project which continues to unfold before us; there is the search for a new Minister, who will walk with the congregation into the next number of years – to name a few big things coming up. That is why it is why our Congregational Visioning Day on January 26th is so important. It is an opportunity for us to start this year by dreaming and visioning about the possibilities for us as a congregation. To think big. To look deep. And to open ourselves to God’s dreams and visions for our congregation. Remember - **We cannot do what we cannot imagine.** And it will take ***all us*** of – from the youngest to the oldest - sharing and working together to build the future God has planned – step by step, piece by piece, dream by dream – following the star of God’s light and guidance as this year unfolds.

Matthew tells us in the story of the Magi, that God told them in a dream to go home by another way. In our dreaming for this congregation in the coming days – God is urging us, too, to go into this year by another way – seeking a new path, a new vision. And as we do that - whatever stars may beckon - wherever that path may lead – we take the Christmas promise with us – Emmanuel: God is with us. We couldn’t ask for a better Christmas gift than that!