

Sermon 24.01.07

Kate Heinzl, pastor

Children's Time -  The Third Gift

Isaiah 60:1–6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

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.

Epiphany - a new way of knowing something we thought we knew.

Sermon:

Isidor Rabi, a former Nobel laureate in physics, was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?"

"My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?'"¹

Did you ask a good question today...

This has been a season of questions - the theme from the Advent/Christmas materials we've used surrounds the primary question: "How will we know?" Today the specific question is 'how will we know...what we know?'

These questions don't ask us to come up with definitive answers, but to lean into them.

In all of these stories, God has shown up to the least expected.

As familiar as these stories are - they always leave me with all sorts of questions. Some big ones - like: what does it mean to recognize God in our midst?

Questions - palliative care physician and writer, Rachel Naomi Remen, writes:

"Perhaps real wisdom lies in not seeking answers at all. Any answer we find will not be true for long. An answer is a place where we can fall asleep as life moves past us to its next question. After all these years I have begun to wonder if the secret of living well is not in having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company."²

When do we fall asleep with our answers?

Is that what happened to those in Jerusalem? They thought they knew... were comfortable with their understanding, and so didn't pay attention - didn't continue to ask, to seek?

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/19/opinion/l-izzy-did-you-ask-a-good-question-today-712388.html>

² Remen, Rachel Naomi. My Grandfather's Blessings : Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging

Our story today has sorcerers³ - how come the NRSV calls them wise men? Why not wizards? That's how the Greek word magi is defined. The only other time this descriptor is used is in the book of Acts, chapter 13, where Paul meets a magician, Bar-Jesus, a false prophet who is punished for deceiving the people.

Definite outsiders.

Not Jewish, not local... they come seeking. Asking questions. They follow. They don't get lost in their questions.

Is that what we're sometimes afraid of? Getting lost? Not having a star to guide us?

Are there questions that you're afraid to ask, to sit with? That if you look closely, everything might come crashing down?

Questions about faith; about life...

I've moved away from fear, to recognizing that some questions are deeply unsettling.

How to put together the vastness of time and the universe, with the belief in a God who knows us, knows me, intimately...

Unanswerable questions. The questions linger.

Yet those outsiders have much to teach us. Likely they had lots of questions. And yet they didn't get paralyzed by them. They kept seeking, kept asking.

Did they find what they were looking for? Were they disoriented? Disappointed?

They dropped on their knees and worshiped - gave this baby the respect reserved for nobility. And they continued to pay attention - following their dreams back home a different way.

One more thing about these magicians, these outsiders -

They come with costly gifts. Not only have they invested in the journey. They have tangible gifts they offer the child. They give something of value - with little fanfare, without expectation of anything in return.

³ [Strong's Greek: 3097. μάγος \(magos\) -- a Magian, i.e. an \(Oriental\) astrologer, by impl. a magician](#)

Here the outsiders don't become insiders. They stir up anxiety by simply showing up. They don't seem to have a need to fit in, to make change. They worship, they present their gifts, and they leave. We don't hear of long conversations or teachings.

These wise ones - they listened - listened to the insiders; they listened to their dreams. They humbly dropped to their knees. They gave of themselves.

Unlike those who lived in the region - they paid attention.

What does this story invite us toward?

As one of the wise ones of our time, Rachel Naomi Remen suggests - perhaps real wisdom lies in not seeking answers, but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company.

My friends - you are good company.

Let's be more like the wise ones -

Not be afraid of our questions. To ask. To seek. To listen. To humbly follow and to seek.

What questions do you have?

AFTER SERMON:

Special Music

Confession - Ross to lead, will end with the Lord's prayer

Communion - where no one is an outsider. All are welcome.

Instructions - take elements back to your seats where we'll all receive together.

GLUTEN free.

All are welcome

prayer after communion: **VT 942, to read in unison:**

VT 942, to read in unison:

Blessed are you, Eternal God;
through this holy meal you have joined us to yourself and to one another.

Blessed are you, Incarnate God;
you have put your life into our hands; now we put our lives into yours,.

Blessed are you, Breath of God;
as we go forth, set us free to follow where you lead. Amen.

End by singing: 'Break thou the bread of life' HWB 360

Move to sharing