

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

Rev. Frank Yates

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LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

Matthew 2: 1-12

With great artistry Matthew draws two opposite reactions to the birth of Jesus. The newborn King evoked either acceptance or rejection, either magi bringing their gifts or Herod bearing his sword. Astrologers follow a star from the East. They reach Jerusalem and start asking troubling questions. An anxious king summons the chief priests and teachers of the law. They open their scrolls to the prophet Micah who envisioned a future leader born in Bethlehem: “From you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people, Israel.”

As the astrologers head south, Herod invites them back to the palace to debrief their findings. Herod tells the star gazers, “When you find the child let me know so that I may go and worship him too.” Truly one of the most blatant lies in all human history. Showing once again the close connection between lies and violence.

Approaching the City of David, the magi see the star resting over the house of Joseph and Mary. Inside they bow in adoration and worship, bringing gifts fit for a king. Then instead of conferring with

Herod, they take an alternative route home. Why? Because God warned them in a dream to avoid Jerusalem. And so the magi skip town, leaving Herod holding the bag. Matthew wants us to see in the magi the fulfillment of Isaiah's expectation that all nations would flow to Zion to worship with their gold and frankincense. And that opposition to Jesus begins even at his birth.

This morning as we hear this lovely tale afresh, let's ask ourselves this question, "What clue does this story give us about our own search for the newborn King?" I think this lovely story presents us with this amazing insight: God is searching for us even as we are searching for God in our lives. God reveals himself in four different ways to the magi. And God still reveals himself to us in these four distinct ways to transform us.

Initially God speaks through the marvels of nature to the magi, "following yonder star." A bright light, a star, a comet, the alignment of Jupiter and Saturn and Mars-who knows? The heavens indeed declare the glory of God, even to foreigners, Gentiles, pagans, if you will. As Paul reminds us in Romans, God has made his eternal power and deity clearly visible to all people in nature. Through Christ God created all that is-the sun, the moon, the stars, and the earth.

And the creation itself in all its glory bore witness to the birth of Christ in a marvelous way.

God spoke spectacularly to the magi as they followed that kindly light in the western sky. And God can still speak to us in nature, formed by God's power and wisdom. Both its grandeur to delight and its awesome power to destroy. If our hearts are open, the heavens are still chanting the glory of God when we have ears to hear and eyes to see.

Secondly, God addressed the magi through the Scriptures. Once in Jerusalem, the religious leaders turn to the prophet Micah to give the astrologers further guidance. They are pointed to Bethlehem, the City of David, out of which a new David would one day arise. With that word, the magi turn south to find the newborn King.

Nature's kindly light needs supplementing by the Word from the Lord, an explicit hope of the prophet. Our long search for God is aided by God's own word to us, a prophetic summons that calls out, "Seek me and you will find me!" Even in the ancient words of Scripture, still pointing to the "light that shines in the darkness", the light that would shine in our hearts. The Scriptures led the magi to Bethlehem. They would lead you there as well.

Thirdly, God addressed the magi in the face of a newborn child. God humbled himself to take up residence in human form. “The Word indeed became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” God with us, Emmanuel, lying in a manger-that precisely is the good News of a great joy.

And so the magi worshipped him with gladness, spreading their gifts before him. Their long search ended at the side of a baby’s crib. Paul said that the purpose of the incarnation is that “every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.” God revealed himself in a human face and the magi bowed their knee in adoration.

God reveals himself preeminently to us in the face of Christ, born to set us free. In the face of Christ, we see the depth of suffering love and compassion. In the face of Christ, we see the hopes of all the world gathered up in his humanity. If we would find God, we would find him in the face of Christ, born of a woman, born under the law. Here we bow our knees and offer our gifts, indeed, our lives.

Finally, God reveals himself to the magi in a dream. The magi are warned to return home by a different route. God directs their path by speaking into their hearts through a dream. God points them

in the way of civil disobedience, refusing to honor King Herod's directive. It probably saved their lives. What Herod did to the innocent children of Bethlehem he no doubt would have done to the magi-to silence them as potential witnesses to the newborn King.

God can speak to us in the depths of our conscience, in our dreams and in our personal experiences. Have you ever heard a divine whisper in your hearts when something deeply personal happened to you? Something only you could understand as a word of God to you? After doing or saying something you knew was simply wrong. Or after doing or saying something that felt so right. In those moments God is correcting you or encouraging you. Either way God is speaking to you through your unique personal experience.

Something in your heart addresses you and you understood it as the voice of God. God can be very personal that way, deeply existential. And it can change your life. When the magi responded to that divinely given dream, it probably saved their lives. And your personal experiences can save your life and maybe even save your soul. A God thing, we would confess. I know this has happened to many of you, as it has for me. Something deeply personal-that was a gift of God for you. Your personal Epiphany.

This morning, we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Here elements from the creation speak to us of God's grace. In this loaf and in this cup we are reminded of God's profound love for us, each one of us. If we listen with our hearts, we can experience God's mercy and kindness afresh. Christ would make himself known to you in the breaking of the bread, the pouring of the cup. May your eyes be opened and your heart renewed. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Thanks be to God. Amen.