

### **January 3, 2021 (Focus: Matthew 2:1-12; Epiphany)**

The Magi: they traveled far, we are told. They traveled far away from the comforts of home, and in that journey they no doubt encountered much that was new or foreign to them. They needed to travel a road that was at times dangerous, at other times meant encounters with those who helped them on the way. They encountered people and circumstances that took them much wisdom to work out their motives and what role they were to play on the magis' own journey. The magi arrived to find that what they were seeking was just in infancy, at the beginning. And even though they found what they were looking for, the omens were not all good, finding hope did not negate needing to be watchful for and avoid evil. But they followed the star, a little light in the vast darkness, for even a little light gives hope.

As we turn the calendar and seek light in the darkness for ourselves and for the world, we too are on a journey. We have traveled far, or at least it has seemed like an awfully long journey this past year. We have encountered much that was new or foreign to us. We travel a road that is at times dangerous, and at other times means encounters with those who help us along the way. We too encounter people and circumstances that take much wisdom to work out motives and find out what role others will play on our journey. We too encounter omens that indicate difficult steps ahead. We have hope but it does not negate being watchful for and avoiding evil. We follow the light, for just as was revealed to the magi, Emmanuel is being revealed to us anew this Christmas-tide.

About 500 years before the birth of Christ, it was the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who said that we can't walk through the same river twice, for neither the river nor the person is the same each time the river is crossed. Time, and experience, change a person. And yes, sometimes it does seem these days as if one day is much like the rest, but really each moment makes us a different person than we were before, even in this pandemic. Some may not realize it, but each day we get through the loneliness and uncertainty and difficult changes we've had to make is another day we grow stronger, another day we have built up some resilience. Another day that more of the world is revealed to us, some bad and some good. Another day that God is revealed to us, sometimes in our questions and doubts, sometimes in the faces and actions of strangers or friends or loved ones, sometimes in the still quiet moments when our very breath connects us with the cosmos and the breath of God.

The magi went home by another way, we are told, for the circumstances changed, in that the omens were such that they could not trust Herod, and the journey home was different for them because they were changed; they grew in wisdom as they came to understand, as the revelation helped them to see, that the king they sought was quite different from what they had expected and maybe even thought they had wanted. And they learned that sometimes what you seek, especially when it is something of great value, that it unfolds over time.

We are continuing our journey from this point forward by another way, not walk through the same river twice. Yes, we take some things with us—history, learnings, wisdom, experiences. But we are not the same people we were 12 months ago, or even one day ago. Where will this journey take us, we don't fully know, even if we weren't in a pandemic or at a difficult point in our economy or our democracy, we still wouldn't know fully where our journey of life will lead next; it is the nature of life itself. But we know at least one key aspect of our faith journey, we know that we walk with God. Emmanuel, God with us, promises us that God will be with us, no matter what comes next in life or in faith. Like magi, good for us to encounter the child, the infant, again; our understanding of God is in a way always growing from a spark, from what might seem young and then matures. And if we are open to God's strange and wondrous revelation, it can lead us on a marvelous journey, ever closer to who we are called to be.

God of Light and Love, long ago a star beckoned to those who sought a light in the darkness, who sought a new way of being in the world. A way of peace and understanding, a way of respect for all life and each person, as one created by you. In this very moment we still seek your ways and your light. In this very moment, the star still beckons. Let the star call us to new ways of healing and hope, restoration and renewal, as we discover again Christ's call to discipleship. **Amen.**

**Children's Message: imagine the next chapter in the story. Breakfast the next day, an extra piece of bread...you have it...no you...no you...I wonder if our servants have had enough to eat? Treating all those they met on the way home with kindness, maybe even lightened their load by giving away to those in need, selling their rich cloaks and buying simpler ones so could give away, and having their hearts lightened too.**

Creator God, we seek your holy presence in this moment. We gather in the Light that was before, is now, and ever will be. We seek the Light's ancient wisdom. We gather in the Light that is your continuing gift, and seek to live into the Light's new wisdom. As we face a new year and a new day, we know that not all is new, for we face difficulties we have seen and experienced before or that are ongoing. Too many dead or sick or feeling isolated and alone in this pandemic, too many hungry and homeless in our economy, too many fearful of one another, fears inflamed by some for political advantage and power.

Sometimes we feel lost and even consumed by darkness. We wonder if there is good. We wonder if there is hope. We wonder even if we are loveable. In wondering about ourselves and whether we are cared for, we forget that we are called to care for others. In our fear or neglect, our thoughts and actions dim the value and worth of others, and ourselves. Have mercy on us.

Sometimes we feel lost in shadows of unclear choices. Which way will lead to justice? To transformation? To peace? We are afraid to risk a step out, unsure of the path. Have mercy on us.

But in Christ, we have been given a new Light, kindling unconditional love for us, and showing us a well-lit path to healing and wholeness and forgiveness, to courage and clarity and action, to words and deeds that uplift and inspire. Thanks be to God. We gather in the Light that is our own, emerging anew each day. We seek to share this wisdom, nurtured in the Light from that manger long ago, nurtured in your light O God that never leaves us.

There are so many among us, in our community, and in the world suffering in body, mind, and spirit, in need of your healing compassion and care – grant all in need an experience of your renewing touch, especially...

Moment of silent meditation...

Gracious God, we pray for peace in our minds and in our hearts, as we struggle with how to care but not be overwhelmed by the caring. We know you intend peace for us, for we have heard it in the words of our teacher and spiritual guide and savior, the one we call the Prince of Peace, in whose name we pray. Amen.