

Epiphany Sunday  
January 6 & 7, 2018

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### Epiphany

My two year old grandnephew got a Jack-in-the-box for Christmas. He giggled and giggled every time Jack popped up. Whether it was because of the expectation or surprise of it all I don't know, but his exuberance was contagious. Every time Jack popped up he would dutifully put him back in the box. I was thinking, that's what we'll all be doing. Putting mangers, Christmas trees, ornaments back in their boxes. Christmas gets put away for another year. But on this 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas I am here to tell you that it begins again, day after day. My point is better told in an old Legend from Russian told by Phyllis McGinley. An old grandmother, Babushka, is invited to meet the royal child just born in Bethlehem. The old woman is about to retire for the night when out of the winter's rush and roar came shepherds knocking at her door. They share with her the good news that the long awaited child has now been born and beg her to come and give what help she can. Babushka is good-hearted woman, but the warmth of her bed looks more appealing than a cold journey on a winter's night. She tells her night callers that she will go tomorrow, and when they ask her to give them some food that they can take in her stead, she again tells them, "Tomorrow". When tomorrow dawned Babushka was as good as her promise. She prepares a basket with goods and gifts.

A shawl for the Lady, soft as June,  
For the Child in the Crib a silver spoon,  
Rattles and toys and an ivory game.  
But the stable was empty when she came.

Babushka arrives too late to meet the royal child and share her gifts. She is angry with herself for not accepting the invitation and she begins to wander the world looking for the Christ-child. She joins the legions of wanderers down history who search for the one who will bring new hope and new meaning into their lives. In her search she finds children everywhere; she finds many children in their cradles and many mothers nursing their infants. With each child she finds, she leaves gifts in the hope that that child is the Christ child. But she never knows for sure.

In today's Gospel we have Matthew's story of the magi, pagan astrologers. The star leads the wise men to Jerusalem where they inquire of King Herod where this child is born. Herod gets nervous. No one, no one will dismantle his power and authority, get his wealth, or take his throne. So he asked his priests and scribes who quote the scriptures which point to Bethlehem as the place of the birth. Herod is like Pharaoh at the times of the exodus from Egypt. Pharaoh was warned by astrologers that a liberator would be born who would lead the captive Hebrews to freedom. Pharaoh responded by ordering the massacréd of new Jewish male children to ensure the liberator would never survive. But the father of Moses is forewarned in a dream and Moses, the future liberator, is saved.

The gifts: gold to signal a King; incense given to a God; and myrrh, an ointment to soothe suffering of humanity. Matthew has these Gentiles acknowledging Jesus' authority, divinity, and suffering. Matthew is saying that this Christ came for all peoples and nations, not just the Jews.

The Magi risk their own lives by not obeying the order of cruel Herod to return and report where Jesus is. Matthew and Luke, the two Gospel writers who include the birth of Jesus, are writing to tell us that the Christ was rejected by many of his own people. He comes for the shepherds, the lowest in society; he is born on the edge of the dessert, Bethlehem, between the wealth of Jerusalem and the nomads who have nowhere to call home. He comes as a fulfillment of God's promise to lift the lowly, have mercy on those who fear him; fill the hungry with good things, help his servants and remembering his promise of mercy.

The Magi went out of their way to find God. They journeyed long. They were inconvenienced. They were humble enough to seek wisdom from a tradition not their own. They found greatness finally in a smelly cave among a poor couple at the edge of poverty.

Here it is, the way of the disciple. To seek, to be inconvenienced, and to give what one has, to praise and thanks, and to spread the news with great joy. God of the poor and lowly always invites those with abundance to seek more than we have found yet. We are meant to seek God in every day: in the faces of those seeking understanding, those who are in need; those who are knocking at our door. We seek Him in the one about to be deported or in the children left behind; we seek Him in the prisoner who no one cares to rehabilitate, we seek him in those displaced by multinationals, we seek Him in those who are sick: we seek Him in the words of our prophets.

The Magi “went home by another way.” Everyone who finds Jesus is drawn to another way. Our presence in Church this evening/morning numbers us among those who seek the face of the living God. We come each week to celebrate our faith in Jesus as our Lord. At the end of Eucharist we are sent to share with others what we have experienced here. We do not have to travel the world like Babushka. We find Christ here. We find Christ in the midst of the community that needs our gifts of life and love. We find Christ wherever we seek Him. Let us not put Jesus away in a box with the Christmas decorations. Let us seek God beyond our own small boxes.

Amen.