

Sermon for January 5, 2014

Epiphany of our Lord, Matthew 2:1-12

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

If you **happened** to be at the 7pm **Family** Service on Christmas Eve you would have heard a **children's** sermon that was based on the book, "*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*". For those of you who do not know this story it is about the Grinch, who was a **cranky** sort of guy, and it is about the people of **Whoville** who **loved** Christmas. The Grinch **hated** seeing and hearing all the people all so **happy** as they went about preparing for Christmas—so he tried to figure out a way how to **stop** Christmas from coming to Whoville. He decided that if he stole **all** the presents, **all** the decorations, and **all** the special Christmas food the people would be **sad** and their **Christmas** would be ruined. The Grinch spent Christmas Eve night **sneaking** around dressed up like Santa Claus stealing **everything** Christmassy from the people's houses. When **Christmas** morning came the Grinch was **shocked** to find that his plan did not work—Christmas came to the people **just** the same. The people were **still** happy, they **gathered** together hand-in-hand to sing Christmas songs, and they **still** enjoyed their day. The Grinch learned that Christmas is about **more than** just presents and decorations.

In our gospel reading for this morning we have **another** Grinch of sorts in the person of **King** Herod, although; King Herod was like the **Grinch on steroids**. He was a **non-Jew** who was appointed as 'king' by Rome. He was **ruthless**. He **murdered** his wife, his **3** sons, his **mother-in-law**, his **brother-in-law**, his **uncle**, and **many** others. He was a **tyrant** who could not tolerate **any** contenders for his throne. He was **power-hungry, self-absorbed**, and a **controlling** oppressor who was **nearing** the end of his life. And he lived in fear of anyone who might threaten his throne.

When the **Wise Men** who came from the East came to Jerusalem asking about the child who had been born the '*King of the Jews*' King Herod was **frightened** and **all** of Jerusalem was frightened with him. He **called** together the chief priests and the scribes of the temple and wanted to know just **where** this **Messiah** was to be born. They told him **Bethlehem**. That sparked even **more** fear in Herod's heart. He wanted to know the **time** and the **place** where this baby was born. Wise men—Go—search—find this child—Herod said, '*I want to go and pay homage to him*'—*ya right!!!*

Even though the Eastern Orthodox Church says there were **12** Wise Men—hence the **12** days of Christmas—the Western Christian church has said that there were **most** likely **3** members of the priestly caste of Zoro-as-tree-an-ism, who were noted for their study of the stars as part of their religion, who were **searching**

for the baby Jesus. These men were **Gentiles**, they were **wealthy**, they were **observant scientists**, they were **astronomers**, and they were **scholars**. When they left King Herod they **followed** the star until it stopped over the place where the child was. The Wise Men were **overwhelmed** with joy when the star stopped. They went **inside** the house, **knelt** down, and paid **homage** to the child. The **gifts** that they had in their treasure chests and offered to baby Jesus were ordinary gifts one would have offered to a **king**. **Gold** with its great value, **frankincense** is a perfume, and **myrrh** is a common anointing oil. The gifts they brought had a symbolic significance in the light of the **identity** of the baby to whom they were given. Gold—the symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense—a symbol of deity or a Divine Being, and myrrh—a symbol of death. The gifts they brought to baby Jesus spoke of their **respect** for His **divine** identity and their **vision** about his death at the **hands** of humankind. They had traveled **far** to see this child, the ‘king of the Jews’, and they were led to **kneel** before a baby born of **poor** parents in an out of the way place.

Now maybe you are wondering where is God in this whole story? Honestly, I have **not** mentioned much about Him so far. The **truth is** God was in the **midst** of this whole story. God **guided** these wise men to come from the East to Jerusalem, God **used these men** who were **not Jews** to observe the star—to want to come and pay homage to a baby they did **not** know, God **set** the star in the sky

ahead of them **stopping it** for them over the place where the child was, and God **sent warning** to them in a dream **not** to return to Herod whereby they left for their own country by **another** route.

I find God's **wonderful grace and hope** for us all in this story. Here God **uses** these Wise Men who practiced **another** religion to be the ones who come to bear these **precious** gifts to God's own Son. This pushes **us to expand** our understanding of the ways God **reaches out** to people to announce the good news in and through Jesus and what it means for us to have faith and to reach out to others even **if** it means **extending** ourselves beyond our comfort zones.

The Wise Men **did not** come looking for the baby through the **ways and traditions** we hold near and dear as **religious** people of today. They came seeking Him after **studying** the night skies. It is **incredible** to realize that God's own work of **grace and embracing** all people is more of a 'mystery' than a 'written formula' because God's ways are **always bigger** than our understanding.

So perhaps this is the **message** for all of us. Just as the **Wise Men** who journeyed out of **their own** land and the **places of comfort** for them to seek out the baby Jesus **maybe**, as we use and develop the gifts that God has given us, we **too** can **venture out** and become all **we were meant to be**. God **calls us** to do what the Wise Men did, and that is to **seek** Jesus. With hearts and eyes **wide open** possibly we **too will encounter** God's 'mystery' in our **own** lives as well. **When**

we step out in faith, **following** God's lead, **looking** for meaning in our lives, **heeding** the call to be to who God calls us to be, **chances are** we too will encounter God in **unexpected ways and places** also. When we answer God's call it is **certain** that our lives—**much** like the lives of the Wise Men—might **never** be the same again. God's **grace and mystery** comes to us when we **least** expect it. All **thanks** be to God. **AMEN.**