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January 4, 2019
Sunday: EPIPHANY

Epiphany Year C



Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

From birth to age 12 and back again goes the common lectionary, just crazy like our world these days. Travelers have returned from visits far and near and other travelers check in with our Scripture Reading.

Like football, Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi is a game of two halves: In the first we see them encountering Herod and his court, and in the second Mary and the infant Jesus. Each half has a different emotional key which structures and drives the dynamics of its interactions: Herod's response to the meeting is fear – and the greek word tarassō, which has overtones of being stirred and agitated, gives us the sense of a very visceral response...we can perhaps imagine Herod pacing restlessly up and down whilst he waits for the answers to his various questions. Matthew then shows us the consequence of this fear as we see Herod attempting to take control of the situation by pinning it down in various ways. Alongside this Matthew also reveals fear's destructive effect by showing us the increasingly constricted space within which Herod operates as the story unfolds. An initial open encounter involving the entire court (and circling out to 'all of Jerusalem') is replaced by meetings with a select few and finally a secret conversation with only the magi themselves. Herod's fear and need for control, successively reduces the degrees of freedom within which he can act and thus

curtails his capacity to think and act creatively.

In the second half we see the operation of a diametric dynamic in which the Magi are content to simply follow where the star leads them. The overwhelming joy they feel when finally it stops provides the emotional key to the passage and here, in contrast to Herod's agitated summoning and questioning, there is a sense of tranquil, collected acceptance: they see, they kneel, they offer what they have. Once again this is a journey marked by changes of space – but this time the movement is from the constrained space of their final meeting with Herod into one where they are subjects with their own agency, not objects being controlled by the will of another. Matthew gives us a Epiphany God waiting to challenge and transform – forgive us for those occasions when fear or hostility restrict our openness to your Presence and possibility and keep us trapped in a barren place....

Epiphany God – bright Morning Star, waiting to enrich and enlarge us – may we know your Presence with us now, and, in opening ourselves to embrace its possibilities, find new places to inhabit and different ways by which to journey onwards.

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[From the Fat Pastor blog](#)
Frankincense and myrrh have been used for medicinal purposes for over 5,000 years in places like India and Saudi Arabia. I do not pretend to know anything about their effectiveness. There are several websites that you can find with articles extolling the virtues of these ancient oils and resins. What you and I think about their effectiveness in healing though, is inconsequential. What seems clear is that men from the East might have understood these two gifts to have medicinal value.

Mary gave birth to a son.

Though we often sing "Silent Night," anyone that has been anywhere near the birth of a child knows that there is nothing silent about the experience. Giving birth is a messy and dangerous. Today a mother dies in childbirth once every two minutes. In many parts of the world, it is the most dangerous thing a woman can do. According to the Lukan account, Mary gave birth in a stable, surrounded by animals, with no midwife. She gave birth in what we would be considered, even then, deplorable conditions. I've written before that [the unnamed miracle of Christmas is that Mary survived.](#)

What I have not noticed before this year, is that the reason she survived might have come in the gifts presented to Jesus by the magi.

To a modern reader, the gifts of the Magi seem strange and impractical. To explain these peculiar gifts, many have placed dubious symbolic meanings on them. Instead, I feel it much more likely that these gifts were extremely practical. Notice that Matthew says that the magi "Saw the child with Mary his mother, and then knelt down...".

These gifts might have saved Mary, and indirectly Jesus himself.

We would be good to take note that Mary's "Baby Shower" was an act of valuing the life of a woman.

Though Mary gets the short end of the stick through much of the book of Matthew, this act of gift-giving is a reminder of how important a mother is to a child.

-look up Fat Pastor

Traditionally we have marked our doorway with chalk on this Epiphany Feast to remind us of those gift-givers. 20+C+M+B +19 but just maybe this year I will change it to **20+T+T+T+19** for the following reason.

We are still in the Liturgical Season of Christmas even though the stores have Valentine Cards out and most of us began putting away decorations around the first of January. Tacky lights are off for a year, trees have been re-cycled. While cleaning up did you like I did a few years back find a gift that you had tucked away so as to have it for another but by Christmas they were no longer with us on this earth? This was a gift for another - - but God had another idea.

So a surprise gift was tucked away and I/you found it after the Christmas holidays when I/you was putting away 'Christmas'. That made me think of Gifts I could've but didn't give. Most material gifts are superficial, things of no real and lasting value. Three gifts I could have given, **time, truth, and tenderness**. I think maybe those were the gifts that would have been more appreciated and now at Epiphany we can still give those things to a loved one. The gift of TIME, how often do we put off the little visits that would mean so much. As a teen, adult; no time this week, this month, today. I'm busy you know! We assume there will always be time to talk, visit, and eat together, time to travel for time and conversation. In town last year I skipped out to buy stuff for the following year rather than gave time. Maybe you spent time with other's rather than family and now well, there is no more time.

Grandparents, are gone, maybe even a parent or sibling is gone. Time ran out. TRUTH, tell them, make the time to express how much you admire, or love them. Sit down and say what we admire, what they taught us, and what we treasure. Did she/he know or did we assume they knew just how important they were to us. Do we take for granted that there will always be time to hear the gift of your truth.

TENDERNESS, we love and don't say it/express it, we stammer and stutter, and we miss opportunities to be tender. Is there someone that needs that part of you shown? TIME, TRUTH, AND TENDERNESS, those Magi were seekers, late comers, outsiders, and pagan, and still they recognized the birth of Christ. They were the late-comers, these seekers, and they taught us that the only response to birth of Christ is for us to be gift givers too: they brought special ones, but He/Jesus in his adult life made it clear that gifts weren't just 'stuff'. Jesus needs the gift of our time, our work for justice, no getting to it later. You **will** run out of time. Give the Lord the gift of your time; give him the truth, quit fabricating and rationalizing about yourself;; tenderness isn't achievements. we without love are NOTHING. Fall in love with Christ. He want's your tenderness.

People around you, family and friends, need those also. Start spending time not money on someone, The Gift of God made flesh is to give TTT. THE GROWN UP Jesus want's TTT Time everyday in the Word, no getting to it later. When you have the time you will run out of time.

TRUTH gift, too much energy is spent on excuses. Give the gift of truth, be honest. TENDERNESS. Good things, fortunes given away, "without love we are nothing". He wants your tenderness, pray to give Christ and people around you those TTT. Spend time, don't be shy, speak truth, standoffishness, be tender. The Magi come, offer gifts and disappear. We can be Magi everyday with TTT everyday to each other. Go, unpack your



treasures and give those gifts to Christ and his people.

Annette will return to First United Church of Christ, Richmond on January 13..