

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Follow That Star"
Dr. J. Dent

January 3, 2010
Epiphany Sunday

One event in a person's life can change every other perception and the whole of the reality of one's life. A death, a birth, a marriage, a loss of a job, or a loss of health usually qualify as such events.

Sometimes the one event is meeting a new person. I met a new person in my music class, or rather she reached out to me, and I went to a home Bible Study, something I had never done before. People my age had cared for me and loved me and I believed it was a direct result of their personal commitments and relationship to Jesus Christ, as they told me. So as a 14 or 15 year old, my life was forever changed. I was set on a whole new path. The trajectory of my journey had been irrevocably altered.

The same thing happened when I met Lynn, my wife to be. The same thing happened in a more gradual way in my commitment to the Presbyterian Church in Canada. God had met me in the Presbyterian Church and continued to surprise me with God's grace, mercy and truth. Those are just pieces of my life.

We don't have too many pieces from the Magis' lives. We don't know how many of them there were, although the word is plural. So it wasn't someone travelling alone. We don't really know how rich they were except that it appears they were able to fairly easily get an audience with Herod. So they probably at least had the appearance of riches. They could have sold everything they had and gave themselves that appearance as a part of their devotion to the journey. We have met some Christians who have sold all their worldly assets to go to the Mission field. It does happen today.

We do know they had an interest in the star. We don't know how apparent or subtle the star was. We do know that the event was not at the same time as the shepherds' heavenly vision of the angels singing. Although we do put the Nativity scene with the Magi and their gifts at the stable, the Bible says they met the Holy Family in a house. That's where they opened their costly presents. Today we might call them lavish housewarming gifts. But then that goes against the smushed in time Nativity scene we usually paint.

The gold was an appropriate gift for a king. It funded their travels, which they didn't know they were about to undertake. They would go South for at least the winter or two to Egypt. The *frankincense* was the priestly ingredient for the incense offered in the tabernacle to God. It was the holy smoke which rose as a symbol of the prayers of the saints in the very presence of God. The dried white resin was a much used commodity in the old spice routes from S. Arabia to Gaza and Damascus. (Isaiah 60:6) The *myrrh* was used in embalming procedures, and so this gift was prophesying the death of the king even as a child. Some interpret these gifts as emphasizing Jesus as prophet, priest and king. And so he is.

But what strikes me this year about the Magi was not so much the wisdom in welcoming the King. It was what it cost them. Had they had relationships, such as families, wives, children, can you imagine what might have been said to them? What do you mean you're going to find a new born king? Where you are going? What do you mean you don't know where you are going? Is this about that star gazing you have been doing? Are you nuts? And for how long are you going? What do you mean you don't know how long you will be gone? And your selling our assets to do this? I don't think so. (pause) Well, perhaps this is too much of a modern or post-modern spin on the family reaction to such a quest. But we can imagine the costly nature of the adventure the magi chose to undertake. It did cost them.

And our choices to follow Jesus cost us as well. If we take seriously what we are called to be and do in 2010, then we should reflect on the costly nature of what we say we believe in. I was listening to Bob McDonald on "Quirks and Quarks" CBC radio yesterday and I realize again the incredible size of the universe and the even smaller milky way galaxy in which we live, which is only tens of thousands of light years across with billions of planets. We still haven't found one like earth. Scientists say they must be out there. We also can't know for sure what makes up over 90% of what our planet travels through. Many call this dark matter. On top of this, one speaker boldly suggested we can not even know for sure scientifically what reality is. We cannot scientifically separate our perception from the reality in which we live. My conclusion in considering this is that we all have constructed our lives on faith, by trusting that our perceptions are real. Otherwise we get absurd bumper stickers such as the one Bob quoted yesterday saying, "This bumper sticker is written in Spanish when you are not reading it." Or consider Einstein's "The moon is not there when you aren't looking at it." Certainly we have much to learn about how our perceptions construct our

reality. This is one more reason why I believe so strongly in small groups. We need one another to help each other know the reality of our lives, our strengths, our weaknesses, and how much we in fact need each other. It is why I am encouraging everyone to join a small group in the church or the community to give of yourself, to learn, to help one another. And if we can help, please don't hesitate to ask.

The reality of our lives has been greatly changed by the birth of that child so long ago. The reality of international visits to this child at a young age, guided in part by their astronomical or astrological observations, makes us realize again that our journey has a certain angle to it. We are to meditate on this manifestation of the great King. We are to consider those whom it cost a great deal.

We are to remember that this journey showed that what Jesus brought was for all nations, not just a few in the Middle East at the time. It was for you and for me. It was for every tribe and tongue and nation.

The magi risked as they sought out to follow that star and find that child. We too are invited to make a similar journey. We too are invited to risk much in the pursuit of the goals and desires of the King.

Our own serenity, our own sense of peace is at risk as we share with others what we experience. Yet it is all worthwhile as we relate reality as we understand it to others. We may not have advanced degrees in science or any other field, but we can share what we have received. With whatever education and experience we do have, we are called to relate and to explore what we do know and reach out for help when we don't know.

The journey we are on is for the rest of our lives. We only have one life to give. We ought to consider everyday how we might live that life in service to the One who gave his life for us. Perhaps this year might be again a time of dreaming, of new visions, and of new hope for what each of us might do as we serve this King. May we use all our creativity, energy and gifts as we attempt this in another New Year.

Heaven help us as we do.

Let us pray.