

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
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The Magi Journey

January 9, 2011
1st Sunday after Epiphany

Every year we journey through the shopping season until the end of school, and the brief hiatus from work for the 25th of December which we believe is the end of Christmas instead of the beginning of the 12 day season. Then we have on the 13th day after Christmas this smaller holiday called Epiphany.

When I was down in California, I went to my mother's Episcopal Church called St. Timothy's. There we went on Thursday night to an Epiphany celebration, held on the twelfth night of Christmas. And after a service of high communion, including a strong cloud of incense and a gentle sound of bells, we sang some of the same hymns that we are singing today. And afterwards there was a potluck with cupcakes, some of which had tokens in them which would put a mission in your life to do something for God, before the next Epiphany. This mission would remind us of the larger mission the Wise Men were on. Their task was to point to the Saviour. Our task is the same, even if we accomplish it with small acts of mercy and love.

Today we are reminded that Epiphany is not the one day event that some churches celebrate, whether last Sunday or on January 6th, or even stranger, on January 5th. Although officially they are not seasons, Epiphany is like a season, as Pentecost is like a season. The latter reminds us of the work of the Holy Spirit, someone we need to hear about and from much more than we do. Epiphany's main focus is to remind us of the fact of Jesus coming, the incarnation of God, the One from heaven came down to walk among us, teach us, and transform us. This event is for everyone, even though everyone will not receive it as such.

The Good News is that God is seeking us in very creative ways, even as we often are hiding. So you might call this season, and our whole lives, a hide and seek game. Children play it because they like the tension and resolution of the game. Why do we play it spiritually?

The key question we often hear from God, particularly if we start our yearly Bible reading in January is: "Where are you?" God asks each one of us as he asked Adam and Eve in the garden. "Where are you?" This is not a question due to ignorance on God's part. This is for our sake. Are we in a

place to listen to God? Do we want to learn? How important is it to us to hear about where we are spiritually? How honest can we be with ourselves?

We don't know what the Magi were thinking in their long journey. We just know that they took a significant amount of time out of their lives to find the King, and to bring him gifts. What kind of time would we offer to such a spiritual journey to honour Christ in our lives? Is there a holy sabbatical, a serious mission trip, some time apart that God is calling you to pursue? Many of us ask ourselves why we are here, whether retired, whether healed from a serious illness, whether simply questioning our existence.

Perhaps God has a mission for us, beyond those activities that make us able to have a home and some food and clothing and other modern conveniences. Perhaps God does have a mission for us that requires us to travel a long distance, as the Magi did. Perhaps God has a mission for us that requires us to stay where we are and change. This might even be a greater challenge. Because no matter how far we are from the place we were born, whether it is across town, or across the continent, or on a different continent altogether, the great spiritual journey is to know what God is doing inside us so that we can share what difference God makes in our lives.

If you were to quit church, quit the faith, quit your convictions of many years, or a few, would anyone notice besides your immediate family? What change would people see?

And the opposite: if you were to make the church, your faith, your conviction of many years or few a huge new priority in your schedule and in your own mind, would anyone notice besides your immediate family? What change would people see?

I ask these questions because we often don't take much time to consider the costliness of the Magi's journey. We set up the nativity. We remember the star, whatever the astronomical version, whether quite subtle or a Hollywood spotlight. We remember these must have been men of means, because of the costly gifts. They risked visiting Herod (the current king), not knowing how he would respond. They listened to God speaking to them in their dream to not return through Herod's territory.

So much distracts us from taking time to hear God's voice. Every year we are asked through the gospels, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see. If you

have ever had physical ear problems and partial or complete deafness, you know how devastating this can be. Hearing one another is so important to a relationship, this includes signing for the deaf, and other physical ways of communication. Hearing God is a major goal, and something from which we can easily be distracted. I know I can.

If you have ever had physical eye problems, you know how important it is to see what is going on, to be able to evaluate what is happening. If you have had partial blindness or various eye problems, you know what a challenge this can present to your day to day living. My mom has macular degeneration and cannot see the centre of vision but has strong peripheral vision. This means she can no longer drive, which in itself presents many challenges for an 88 year old. But she has learned the bus system, and they are still running there in California. The point is when your vision is affected, your life changes. I believe the same is true when you choose to see what God is doing in your life, and try to look at life the way God wants you to.

The Magi journey is about gaining a different perspective. They were coming into a different orbit just like the stars were. They were aligning their wills to the One who made the stars. They were choosing to interrupt all their regularly scheduled programs for the One. What would you do if you knew that you only had this year to live? Or even just half of this year?

When I rented the car in San Francisco last week, I turned the radio on. There must be a hundred channels in every band. But I stumbled across one Christian station on the AM dial. On this station, I heard a preacher who said their ministry has determined that the ancient flood of Noah took place in the year 4990 BC. They also determined from various passages of Scripture that the total number of years of human history is 7000, based on one day being like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and there is only seven days in the week. This means with the change of the year around the birth of Christ, that the year 2011 is the time when the Lord will come back. They were even more specific than that. They had determined the flood took place on the equivalent of May 21. So their ministry is now preaching that the Lord will return on May 21, 2011, which gives us about four months and two weeks, if I believed their calculations. How would your life change and your decisions if you too believed the end of the world was coming this Spring?

Now please hear me correctly. The Scripture is very clear in Acts 1:7 that "it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." I am not saying I agree this is the date for the end. But my question still stands. How would you change your life if you knew this end would be coming in four and a half months?

What changes would you make? What kind of a person would you be? What priorities would you make urgent in your life?

I can't tell you. I can tell you how I felt when we were on evacuation alert for a forest fire nearby in 2003. I can tell you how I felt in the midst of an earthquake in Southern California in the 70s. I can tell you how I felt when we were on the freeway spinning across four lanes of traffic in the winter slush in Ottawa in the 80s. I can't tell you what's important to you. I only can remind you and ask questions.

Perhaps we all might consider this year as the year to seriously invest in the kingdom of God, trust one another in the body of Christ across denominational lines, and become much more creative in the relationship(s) that are most important to us.

Let me close with one practical announcement in this regard. Next Sunday the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will begin with a service at 7 pm at the Worship Centre on Canada Drive, continue with worship at 7 pm in St Thomas Anglican on the Wednesday night and conclude at Wesley United with the Salvation Army Temple taking part. Let's be God's work together and live this year as if it were our last. What is God saying to you?

Let us pray.