

Sunday, January 3, 2016

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Christ is Here!

Can you imagine the discussion which took place amongst the learned astronomers of the East when the brilliant star was first spotted and shining brightly in the sky? Did you see that star? It's huge. Where is it? When did you see it first? Where is it compared to where we are? And of course in the group's members there would be the one who asked, "Are you sure that this star is unique and different? They all look alike to me why is this one any different? Do you think it has a special meaning? How do we know what it means? Are we going on a trip to find out what it means? When are we going? Where are we going exactly?"

The learned men would have been just doing their regular stargazing and would have noticed an anomaly that night after Jesus was born and a new star appears. They knew something significant had happened and because they were learned men not only of the stars but of international thinking and history they would know why this star shone as it did. These people were men of science that is people who enjoyed learning and studying. They were not at the level of our scientific minds but they were studying the world around them in detail and unlike many others they noticed the star in the sky which had not been there before. As the discussion would have continued they would have also looked to historical records of the area in which the star appeared and they would learn about the Old Testament prophetic writing from Daniel and from Balaam. As learned men they would have studied documents of history from different people and regions and they would have known of the prophets from the Hebrew people. For it was Daniel who first wrote: *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult. (Numbers 24:17)*

This prophecy applies to Israel and David's conquest but also to his coming son, the Messiah a reference made distinct in Genesis 49. Also if Balaam is the ancestor of the Wise Men of Babylon David could have shared this prophesy with them as well—(Daniel 9:25-26) That a Messiah was to be born for all people so that all could be reconciled with the Creator. And so they packed up their camels with food and supplies for a trip.

The light of the star lead them westward to Jerusalem and it is there where they begin the quest of finding the Messiah. The prophet had written of the Morning Star which would enable all to see the way of God but it is this bright star which brightly shone that enabled the Wise Men to journey towards the place where the baby was. And it took time to get there. No trains, no planes, no cars- camels which could only walk so far and at one speed. A large group travelling together with food supplies and where to camp as they wandered from the East to the west. And where exactly did they come from is not certain.

Eventually they arrive in Jerusalem and they ask people on the street about the baby born to save people. They did not know. Eventually King Herod heard about the strangers from the East who were in the city. He wanted to meet them not so that they could fulfill the purpose of worshipping the messiah, but for the King to know who his competition was and how he could eliminate him as a problem or threat to his power and throne.

The King calls the chief priests and teachers of the law to find out where this Christ/Messiah was to be born and they respond in the words of Isaiah the prophet (Is 7:2) in Bethlehem, Judah. Herod sent them to this place and asks them to report back so that he too can worship the baby. So the Wise Men leave and head to Bethlehem still following the star which had lead them on this journey. The star was over top of the house where Mary and Joseph and the baby were but they were no longer at a stable near an inn, but in a house as Joseph was able to get temporary shelter for his family. The Wise Men saw the star and they were overjoyed. They were finally able to stop their caravan and go to the house of Joseph and Mary and tell them their travelling story and how what they desire is to worship the baby. However this baby is no longer a newborn- but an infant going on toddler size. Jesus is a child and is with his mother when these Wise Men kneel and worship him. They have witnessed history—prophecy to truth- words of old fulfilled in an infant's birth and now this baby's future is made solid because Wise Men did not stay in Jerusalem asking questions, but continued to search until finally they could say, "Christ is here."

When they saw Jesus, they were in wonder and awe and offered to this child the gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh. We don't know how long they visited with Joseph Mary and Jesus but they did have an opportunity to sleep and rest. In a dream they received they knew not to go back to Jerusalem and tell King Herod about Jesus the child. They began their return journey via a different path.

It was through the prophetic writings of Daniel, Isaiah and Balaam that the Wise Men came to understand the what of the story of Epiphany the offering of gifts but when they gave their gifts to Jesus we understand how important Jesus was and is to all people. These gifts were of great value:

Gold—which buys what we need

Frankincense: which enriches all it touches

Myrrh an exotic perfume used to cover up odours, but is the aroma which lingers in our senses long after its scent is gone

And yet these are the same gifts that we bring to the Holy One

Gold- our financial commitment to our church- for the general costs of keeping our church going and growing and for the ministry which we share amongst ourselves and in our community

Frankincense-is that talent within each of us that we can share with the community of faith—singing, fixing things, cooking, gardening, administration work, visiting people, doing what needs to be done—together our gifts enrich the life of our congregation

Myrrh- gift of our presence in worship, social groups we join, and the individuals who receive our pastoral care. Sharing a few moments of time with others is a gift that last much longer than the actual time spent

But then the Wise Men received a message in a dream to go back home via a different route. As we reflect on this Epiphany story which calls us to think and reflect, what is God telling us in this moment? When the Wise Men knocked on the door of the house where Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living they saw Jesus and knew that the prophecy of the coming messiah was fulfilled. They proclaimed, “Christ is here” and worshiped him in the presence of his parents.

As we look at this story from the Wise Men’s point of view we realize that not only did they have to go home a different way physically for their safety’s sake they had changed because of the child they had seen. King Herod had wanted them to report back about the baby so that he could kill Jesus. But the Wise Men did not go back to Jerusalem,

something happened to them and their lives were never the same. They were not Jewish and Jesus had not yet started his ministry so they could not claim to be his followers, but there was something which had changed them spiritually.

Maybe it was because the historic writings they had read and studied as well as the stars they had studied for years all connected into the moment when they saw Jesus and said “Christ is here.” They were changed. God had made it possible that they saw the Christ of the prophets and the sign for them to follow was where the star lead them. Their path to truth and further knowledge was lit up by that star which shone in the night.

We have celebrated Christ’s birth amongst people and he came just as God had promised. The Spirit of Christmas continues to be shared because when Jesus was born the whole world was changed even though not everyone in fact very few knew it. When the wise men were in the presence of the Christ child, they worshiped by kneeling before him and through action, they acknowledged for many that Jesus was the Promised One of God. They were changed and returned home transformed by this experience.

As we reflect on this Christmas season, we remember special moments but the significant moment for each of us is when we can say- Christ is here! He is amongst us now and within our hearts and this makes a difference for our lives and for this new year. Jesus is our light and it is on His path his route for our life that we now must choose to follow. He is the light that will show us the way to live but we must follow that path that is lead for us. And to follow that path means to walk together where the light shines for us all. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) This is Jesus- the promised Saviour, Son of God, Alpha and Omega, Morning star and Christ is here. Let us rejoice and give thanks. Amen.

