

Sunday, January 8, 2023 Epiphany Baptism ***“Jesus- From Magi Visit to Being Baptized”***

Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12 Matthew 3: 13-17

The rush to Christmas is over! The holiday period is completed as children and youth return to school and activities starting tomorrow and Jesus is born and alive and amongst us now! We have nothing to fear about what is to come in the days ahead. For as we sang in “O Little Town of Bethlehem” the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Christ’s birth. The hopes and fears of all times. What is significant about these words is that they were written by Phillips Brooks in 1868. One can imagine what Rev Brooks was reflecting upon when he wrote these words as he thought about the times he was living in. Yet how powerful they are for us today when we think about the hope and fear that many people have experienced in 2022 and prayerfully in 2023. There are many matters in our world that call us to be fearful- war continuing in Ukraine, immigration levels are rising with no housing available, inflation and the economic outlook seeing staggering numbers for inflation and the rising cost of everything. Yet there is something about Jesus being born in a manger that night in Bethlehem that causes us to wonder who is this Jesus? And why should we pay attention to his story? He was born into human history, but does this mean he was born to change it?

We all love the story of Jesus birth with angels and shepherds and Mary ‘pondering these things in her heart’. But do we know what happened next? Mary and Joseph receive Jesus and find themselves in need of housing. They move in and stay for a while. One day they receive a knock on the door and in answering it, they meet three Wise Men from the east who want to honour Jesus. They offer him gifts not suited for a toddler, but for an older dying man. Did they know what Jesus’ life would involve? How did they know that the Messiah was born? They knew because of the star. A bright light in the sky at night. A star which appeared for a time yet was not made significant until they were asked how they knew of Jesus? The star.

Star of wonder, star of light, ...westward leading still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.
The star which shone bright for many miles in the sky; and the star which led the magi to Jesus.

What light is shining for us today? There may not be just one; but all who truly imagine the light of Christ need to also remember that Jesus shines continuously if we but open us up and reflect this light. For we are the ones whom Christ calls his disciples.

But our story doesn't do end there today. We jump ahead about 25 years a good length of time in which Jesus grows up physically. He knows that John the Baptist has been preaching about the coming messiah and about the one who was to come. Jesus goes to see John at the Jordan River where a crowd has been listening to John. He is teaching about baptism as a sign and symbol of dying and rising again in new life? John does not want to baptize Jesus but Jesus insists. And when Jesus comes up out of the water, God's voice is heard by those present. Jesus is called his Beloved Son and God states, "With you I am well pleased." A dove descends upon him signifying the Spirit of God in that moment as important because the Trinity is represented through the voice, the dove and Jesus himself as both divine and human.

But who is this Jesus? And how do we tell others about him? How do we share God's words that He is the Promised One, the Beloved Son and the one who was born into this world to change it, to bring hope and to take away fear. What must we do with the story of the stable, the gifts and the waters of Baptism all focusing on Jesus? We must invest our knowledge our time and our hope.

There was a king in India who had four daughters. When they were old enough, he decided to go on a spiritual retreat. He left his daughters to rule the kingdom in his absence, alongside his ministers and advisers. Before leaving, he gave each daughter a single grain of rice with a simple instruction: "Do the best you can with this grain of rice until I return." Then the king departed.

The first daughter wrapped the grain of rice in a gold thread and placed it on her dresser in a crystal box for safe keeping. The second daughter placed her grain of rice in a silk pouch and tucked it under her bed. The third daughter thought, "Every grain of rice looks the same." She threw it out the window with the intention of finding another grain to offer her father when he returned. The fourth and youngest daughter considered what she should do. She thought about it for days and weeks. Then, she took her grain of rice and planted it.

A year passed and the king returned. He called his daughters to the court and asked them each to bring the grain of rice. The first daughter unwrapped her grain, which had become dry and hard. She handed it to her father, who thanked her. The second daughter's grain of rice had broken in two, but she offered it to the king anyway. He thanked her as well. The third daughter went to the kitchen, took the first grain of rice she found, placed it in the palm of her hand, and showed it to her father. "Thank you," he said.

The fourth daughter was empty-handed. The king asked, "Where is your grain of rice?" She led him beyond the palace walls to a vast field of rice that was ready for harvest — enough rice, in fact, to feed the entire kingdom. "Father," she said, "this is your grain of rice."

The king placed the crown on his youngest daughter's head and made her the ruler of the kingdom.

Jesus has come into the world as the Infant King, the recipient of honour and gifts, and the one whose baptism was witnessed by people and God's voice. What are you going to do with this knowledge, these stories of the Promised Saviour? Maybe just maybe you should think of Jesus story from the stable, to gifts and baptism, like the grain of rice the king gave to each of his daughters. The one who became ruler of the kingdom invested that one grain by planting it in fertile soil. She enabled the entire kingdom to be fed through the fields which grew with that one grain.

As the light of Christ shines today- we may take that light into our hearts, and spread it to others and know that God's light will ever stay if we have faith and believe. This Light is the One whom we waited for through Advent and now is ready to begin his ministry by healing and teaching and telling others how to live love.

If you believe in that baby of the stable and the one whom God called my Beloved, the light of Christ shines in you and you are now called to follow and walk the brighter path and see new things with new eyes. But it is up to us to help creation shine. So let us shine for Jesus to reflect his light, answer his call and learn the mystery of what we are meant to do and be as faithful followers of Jesus.

Let us pray:

God of hope and light we praise you for your gift to us in Jesus and seek your guidance as we walk the path filled with your light. Show us your way O God and enable us to understand how we might follow your way. Hear our prayers we ask. Amen.