

## *We Will Leave the Light on for You*

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Anne Fisher

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Matthew 2:1-12

Happy New Year! The New Year seems long ago and Christmas s even farther away. How many of you have your decorations down from Christmas already? How many of you have not listened to a single Christmas carol in the last 48 hours? Are we so over the gatherings of the holiday? We have such a build up to Christmas and then bam- it is time to move on. We are in the post-Christmas season when all the secrets are revealed. Pretty gift-wrapping is now debris for the garbage, meals and treats of delight are now concerns about extra poundage and over indulging.

In our Christmas worship, Mary and Joseph are in the stable, the angels have sung, the shepherds have come and gone, but the kings have yet to arrive. Just when we can reclaim our living room, and return it to its normal state, the wisemen arrive seeking a king. What do we do with these late arrivals?

I started looking at these wisemen, the ones who come after the commotion, and in a very unscientific most questionable theological way, I concluded that these visitors from the east would have made very good Presbyterians. Of all the characters that play in the birth of our Lord the kings, the ones we almost miss, come closest to being like ourselves. This morning let us look at these kings through the eyes of our own tradition as they come bearing gifts to the Christ child. Let us make sure we leave the light on for them so that they do not pass us by!

If we look at the story of the wise men as a journey of faith, perhaps their journey has some similarities to our own faith journey in our tradition.

The wise men come not in the midst of bright lights and choirs of angels; they come quietly following the guidance of a star. They come to this journey through study and reason. These kings had to be thoroughly convinced in order follow a star in the heavens. We have no indication that their journey is a result of an

instantaneous highly charged moment, but more of a quest from a sign. Following one light that stayed after everything else settled down.

The different ways the shepherds and the magi are told of the birth, are like the difference we have in our own faith journey. Some people do have bright lights and immediate conversions. Some make 180-degree turns in their lives when God touches them in a way that they simply can never forget. All of which can be very emotional and dramatic. At times next to the highly charged conversion experiences, some of us feel inadequate. We follow God's teachings for us because it makes sense for the social order of things. We come here on a quest to know more, to learn and to seek and we are not prone to high emotional drama. What informs our faith? For some it is on a Mission trip, leaving our homeland and being in the presence of those not like us. For others it is coming up against our own mortality. For others our journey involves a person whom we admire, whose life reflects a faith beyond our imagination. For some our faith experience is more like a star that begins with thought and then turns into wonder and mystery. Faith is something that makes sense and then stirs the heart in a way that we cannot explain; much like the learned kings must have experienced. For many of us, the time when we embrace our Lord and Savior comes not surrounded by trumpets and fanfare but comes in the midst of the ordinary when the entire hubbub has died away, when things are returning to normal.

The kings are students and their journey began because of their thought but they cannot reach their destination on intellect alone. In their journey, they step out in faith and are open to the wonder and mystery in what they found. It takes a commitment of a faith to travel out of their comfort zone let alone into strange lands. It takes openness in faith to recognize a king from another race, culture and creed.

That is the challenge to being a church; to think beyond ourselves and beyond those who look and act like us. If as a church we are not questioning our comfortable place in the world then we may not be listening to what God is calling us to do. As I was driving in this morning, I listened to On Being with Krista Tippett. Bene Brown, sociologist on faculty at the University of Houston was her guest. Bene was saying, "If we are not moving past our comfort zone and

participating in the difficult conversations with one another, we will most likely fade into irrelevancy.” (It is not an exact quote since I was driving at the time she said it!)

The magi did not do this alone. Their initial sign came from nature but it took the prophets and the scripture to help them find what they were looking for. We are people of the Word, people who use the Bible to guide and direct us. We acknowledge that God speaks to us through each other, through the wonders of nature, but we also use scriptures not as a bludgeon for guilt and exclusion but to enlighten us and affirm God’s love for all people. Seeking information, studying the bible, these things are necessary to grow in faith. Our challenge is what we will do with this knowledge. Can we move it from our head to our hearts and into action?

The wise men are also quite orderly and they respect authority. It is a Presbyterian’s dream come true that they know procedure. How different the kings are from the shepherds? Can’t you just picture the shepherds stampeding down from the hills into Bethlehem without a formal agenda? Then whomever they meet in the streets they would tell what had happened in a haphazard disorganized way, but not the wisemen. They enter the town and immediately go to the top ranking official. That is the orderly thing to do. Of course, this has disastrous results, but the wisemen did the proper thing by going to Herod. Even if the structure was corrupt, the kings respected it. Until... until the Spirit leads them. To find our path we not only need the heart and the head but the Spirit to lead us. In a dream they were convinced otherwise and then they defied the authority set by human hands and went home another way. The magi follow the order of society but also are able to listen to god’s calling to override the evil found in the human order.

There are times when order of rule should not be followed. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, declared his independence from the rule of England by signing the Declaration of Independence. There are times we do listen to a higher calling. The Preamble to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church states that God alone is the Lord of our conscience. So we as a church encourage each other to abide by the laws of the state, but also to vote our conscience and that may sometimes defy culture, and society. Eugene Carson Blake, leader of our

denomination, was also a leader in the Civil Rights movement. The Poor People's Campaign, our current national movement, is co-led by Liz Theoharis, a Presbyterian Minister. We do not passively say yes to authority. We pray, we question and we try to make things better. We have countless stories of good law-abiding people who say enough is enough and follow God's call rather than sinful endeavors.

The magi reach the destination of their journey; they find their king and they worship him. We are a people that worship him as well. These kings are willing to humble themselves before this child and worship him; such is their faith; such is their commitment. And then they leave to return to their home.

I wonder about those kings. Do they know what happens after that? Do they hear about the sad ending to this child? We do not know if the stars in the heaven tell of Christ's greatest glory of spurning death and returning to life so that we might be free of death forever.

The kings have just a piece of the story. It is a small piece of the entire story and yet it is enough for them to come and to worship. They dared to follow that one star out of all the lights that were in the heavens and go to a place not well marked and not known by the authorities and they knew enough to know that they were in the presences of the holy.

After the candle glow and sparkly lights are put away. The stars continue to shine. After our carols and gentle music ceases, the light continues. The light that shines out of the darkness does not go away. That light will help us find our way in our journeys of faith. It is God's light for the wisemen and it is God's light for us sitting here knowing the rest of Christ's story. We are here this morning because not only wise men came to worship a baby but also because of this table before us and the rest of what it means to follow Christ, God's son. Can we be content with the small part that we play in a much larger story? We are Christians facing a new year in Bloomington MN.

We now take up the journey to trust both our head, heart and the Spirit not be afraid to enter new territory. Know that no matter how far we travel, God will leave the light on for us! Where will your journey of faith take you in this New Year?