

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, January 3, 2016

Jeremiah 31:7-14

For thus says the Lord:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,

"Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel."

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,

those with child and those in labor, together;

a great company, they shall return here.

With weeping they shall come,

and with consolations I will lead them back,

I will let them walk by brooks of water,

in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;

for I have become a father to Israel,

and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,

and declare it in the coastlands far away;

say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him,

and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

For the Lord has ransomed Jacob,

and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,

and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,

and over the young of the flock and the herd;

their life shall become like a watered garden,

and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.
I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God!

John 1: [1-9] 10-18

[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his

fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Let us pray...Amen.

Our gospel lesson this morning from John tells us that Jesus is the light of the world. That in the beginning, the Word of God brought all things into being, and was the light of the people.

Which makes sense, because many people in the Christian church celebrate today as Epiphany Sunday, the day marked as the remembrance of when the Christ Child was discovered, or revealed to the 3 Wise Men.

Historically, these men were understood as astronomers from Iran or Iraq, who had training and knowledge of stars and all things scientific. Herod called for them so that they could find the Messiah, and report back on his whereabouts. Herod's story was that he wanted to present gifts to the baby and his family, but scripture tells us that what he really wanted to do was to kill the child, to prevent him from being the King...

Epiphany means a sudden appearance or manifestation of a striking realization. In the context of our gospel lesson, it is the moment that the wise men realized that the baby Jesus really was the Messiah.

We've all had epiphanies: sudden moments of clarity, or surprising flashes of insight. Epiphanies didn't just happen in biblical times, they happen all the time.

Sometime before Christmas, Betsy discovered a new word game called Wordbrain. It's a game where a grid of letters holds 4 words, and you have to find the words in the mix of letters. Early on, the words are 3 and 4 letters long, but as you progress through the game, they become 8 letter words...

It's the coolest feeling to be staring at a grid of letters, all jumbled and random, and to have a sudden realization that there is a word in all that randomness. It's an epiphany! It is immensely satisfying to spot a word in a jumble of letters, to know that I've solved the puzzle. An epiphany. Not a particularly deep one, I'll admit, but it illustrates my point nicely.

We all have epiphanies, in our ordinary, day to day lives, we are struck by a sudden understanding or insight into something. It's one of the gifts God gives us, and though it isn't close to the power of the epiphany of Jesus, the Messiah, it's a similar feeling.

Epiphanies can happen when we are in prayer, when we are driving, when we are shopping, whenever and wherever...and epiphanies concerning our faith are especially gratifying.

The only thing required for an epiphany surrounding our faith is that we have to be searching for it.

Much like the Wise Men searching for the Christ Child, they wouldn't have had their Epiphany if they weren't actually following the star, weren't actually seeking out the Messiah.

If we aren't actually seeking out Jesus in our lives, the chances of having an epiphany about him in our lives goes down...of course God will send us sudden insights about all sorts of things out of the blue, but I believe we need to be looking for Jesus in our lives in order to receive the kind of deep, sudden insight that can change our lives.

Like the Magi, we're meant to follow the clues, look for the star, and use our resources to find Jesus where he is. Of course there will be times when we aren't looking and a sudden insight comes our way, but it takes effort, it takes purpose to discover the Christ Child in our lives, and we are called to make that effort...

People gather each Sunday to worship, to sing, to pray, to rejoice in our role as God's children. And we open ourselves to epiphanies when we do that. Our sisters and brothers on the golf course may claim that their hole

in one was a religious experience, but I'm not buying it: something special happens when God's children gather together to worship God, something that can't happen out in the world when we're by ourselves, or when we're doing something other than worship.

Coming to worship is like seeking out the Christ Child, we're looking, we're searching, we're working together on the clues and signs, hoping for an epiphany. Sometimes one arrives, suddenly, and sometimes it doesn't.

Seeking the Christ Child in our neighbors, in the people around us can sometimes bring about an epiphany as well: if we look inside the people we know in our daily lives, if we seek out Jesus in the people who know us, we just might find him.

If we look for Jesus in the homeless, in the hungry, in the immigrant family desperate for a safe home, we're following the star...if we look for the Christ Child in the homebound, in the irritating, in the frustrating, in the annoying, in the violent, we're following the star.

If we look in the mirror, and seek Jesus in our own selves, search for Jesus in our own lives, we're following the star.

It may be a coincidence, but Epiphany comes in the first week of every new year: a time of reflection, hopefulness, and often, a searching for meaning. New resolutions, new attitudes, new promises...this is the perfect time to reflect on where Jesus is in our lives. A perfect time to seek out the Christ Child by following the star. We are not helpless, we are not without resources, we are not stuck, we can look out on the horizon of our lives to see the bright shining star that signifies the place where the Christ Child lays.

In fact, when we feel stuck, when we feel helpless, it's probably a clue that we need to look for Jesus. It's probably a clue that we need to gather ourselves up, and bring our gifts to the Christ Child, whatever modern gold, frankincense, and myrrh we have to honor the newborn Messiah.

For the Magi, Jesus was there, he just needed to be found. They followed the star, and were rewarded with the Epiphany.

For us, Jesus is there, he just needs to be found. If we follow the star, if we look for him in others, and in ourselves, we will be rewarded with an epiphany. Now is a perfect time to start looking. Amen.