

Get Up. Be light. SHINE!

Epiphany Sunday, January 8, 2023

The Magi have arrived.

Last week, the gospel passage, from Matthew, told the story of the journey of the Holy family into Egypt - their efforts to escape the cruelty of Harod. That story of the Holy family seeking refuge in a strange land is often told the first week of Christmas, and then, as we observe the Epiphany, we flashback to this passage when the magi arrive to greet Jesus. We need a pop-up that explains, “earlier” or “sometime before.”

We do not really know how much earlier, though. Some scholars suggest that years had passed before the magi arrived, and that Jesus was likely a toddler when the family arrived in Egypt. In fact you might have noticed that the magi arrived at a “home” - not a cave or a cattle stall. And of course we know that there were not necessarily three magi - only three gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And you know what else? The story of the magi is found only in Matthew! All of those glorious Christmas passages are from Luke!

...In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus...

...In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night...

...and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors”...

...So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger...

All of that is Luke. None of that is in Matthew here with the Magi.

But today, as we return to “some time before,” we have brought three magi, and we have set them near the manger, as we do year after year. 3 wise ones, following the star.

Our habit of literally cramming the magi into the creche kind of confuses the storyline - but perhaps we could choose to have a spaciousness about the power we give these stories, even as we work to tidy up the accouterments of the season. We will carry all of this out today, following the Christ light into the world - but we don't have to pack these stories up and be done with them.

In fact we must not.

There are so many hooks in this story for us. I wonder which ones you find meaningful?

Sometimes we are invited to think about the treasures that the magi bring, and we ask about their significance. Were they symbols telling, foretelling, the life and death of Jesus? With what treasures might we honor Jesus?

Sometimes we wonder at the power of our dreams, and the holy mystery of drawing near to the divine.

Sometimes we consider the treachery of Herod and all who cling to power and violence.

Sometimes we wonder where, along our journey, we, like the Wise Ones in this story, might be called to return home another way, or to refuse to be used by power for the sake of power.

They are all good questions. They all allow us to do the work of being changed by the story of our faith.

The wise ones were following the star. They were following the great light, and they were led to the One who is called the Light of the World, the One whose coming we celebrated at Christmas. Can you hear the echo of Isaiah? Arise. Shine. For your light has come.

These are passages that are paired again and again for the Feast of the Epiphany - but this time around I was struck by the strong, imperative force of Isaiah. Arise. Shine. Get up. Be light.

This imperative is something more than “follow the light.” Something more than “bask in the light.” You, yourself, are called to shine. You, yourself, are called to be light. Your light has come, and now you have work to do.

Did you see that video this week of lightning striking a truck? The truck was simply sitting in the midst of a storm with no one inside but lightning struck it and the lights turned on! Family of God, what an image that is! I have imagined the possibility that we are like that truck - that when we are zapped by God’s light, by the Light of the World, by love-incarnate that came into the world to be among us, that our lights might just come on. That we might become light! That we, ourselves, might shine. Get up. Be light. Your light has come.

There are storms all around you. Get up. Be light.

There is injustice all around you. Get up. Be light.

People are being unkind. Get up. Be light.

The shelter is full. Get up. Be light.

The prisons are full. Get up. Be light.

Your colleagues are grouching. Get up. Be light.

Complaining is easier. Get up. Be light.

Children are afraid. Get up. Be light.

Teachers are exhausted. Get up. Be light.

Rude and negative chatter is undermining our striving and hoping. Get up. Be light.

The borders are dangerous. Get up. Be light.

The journey is long. Get up. Be light.

Family of God, in Advent we were called into active waiting: Wake. Welcome. Wonder. God with Us. We waited, and we celebrated as love broke into our world once again.

But did it change you? Did you allow yourself to be changed?

Family of God, what is next for you?

Get up. Be light. For Jesus the Christ, born in a manger, is redeeming you.

Your work is to shine.

Amen.