

# *Sermon: The Epiphany*

The Rev. Mike Wernick

January 4, 2015

Year B

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Less than two weeks ago... almost all of us opened some Christmas gifts... I hope we all did... they say it's not the gift... but the thought that counts... but some people received less than they'd hoped for and were disappointed... and I think we've all heard about some family dramas around that sort of thing... some people received one or more things they wanted and were quite pleased... and some people received more than was expected... and were blown away... that happened to me...

Joel's family has a gift exchange... names are drawn after the family reunion... and one of the siblings tells you who you'll be buying a gift for... there's an edit-able Google document on the family's FaceBook page... you can type in two or three suggestions to help guide your "secret Santa"... and almost always... you get what you ask for... I asked for a pair of slippers... or a sweater... or a zippered sweatshirt... but I received none of these...

The person who got my name is my brother-in-law Bill... I don't know if he's still attending... but Bill grew up in the Episcopal church... and he bought me a beautiful stole... a hand-made and hand-painted green stole... that came from England... and contained within the stole... though invisible... was Bill's support and affirmation of my calling... the stole was expensive... I looked it up online... but its value was more like a sacrament... an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace... and I called Bill to tell him how beautiful the stole was... and how much I liked it... and he said that he wanted me to have something that reflected my ordination... something meaningful... and he chose green... because he knew I'd have more opportunity to wear it than any other color...

Theologian John Shea wrote that gift giving is the way the invisible becomes visible... the way the heart is made known... the way spirit risks itself in embodiment... and when the gift symbolizes a flow of love... no matter what it is... it becomes the *perfect* gift... carrying one person into another... just think of O. Henry's The Gift of the Magi...

We also give gifts when babies are born... it's a way of making our celebration... into more of a sacred moment... a way of celebrating the Truth that this new life brings boundless potential... a way of acknowledging that this new person experiences no limits... and that we do not want to impose any... and when we participate in this ritual... when we give a gift... we re-enliven this Truth within ourselves too... a Truth which can sometimes be undermined by the world...

The Wise Men... the Magi... the Magicians... came with gifts... whether it was astronomy... or astrology... or intuition... or something else that tipped them off... they perceived that God was making something new and wonderful... something that was greater than anything they might have hoped for... they followed starlight... to find Christ Light... and they brought gifts which pointed to something far greater than the gifts themselves... I think one of the things they perceived was the Truth that this infant embodied pure potential... that this possibility... this promise... came for all people... and that's why it terrified Herod and the chief priests... they knew that the grown child... would be a threat to their position and power... it's a Truth they weren't ready to bear...

There's that great scene in the 1992 movie A Few Good Men... when Tom Cruise asks Jack Nicholson if he ordered the Code Red which caused a soldier's death... he says he wants the truth... and Jack Nicholson... really pretty much screams back at him... you want the truth... you can't handle the truth...

I think that's a keen observation... there are some Truths which are far too threatening to the systems which oppose them... systems that would have to be almost entirely dismantled and rebuilt... made new... so they could seamlessly reflect those Truths...

there are some family Truths... known or unknown... that lie hidden... but which yearn for the Light of reconciliation and redemption... which sets us free... and there are some Truths we struggle with inside... that take a long time to be healed... that can take a long time to come out... getting to the Truth can be quite a challenge... in John 16:12... even Jesus said... *I still have many things to say to you... but you cannot bear them now... you cannot bear them now... Jesus didn't say you'd never be able to bear them... Jesus didn't say you'd never be able to come to terms with them... just not now... just not yet... go slow... ease into it...*

There's a Truth that's printed at the bottom of p. 9 in today's bulletin... and theologian Richard Rohr puts his own slant on it... he said: *Most of us believe things... because our churches tell us to believe them... and we don't want to be disobedient members of the church... so we say "I believe," as we do in the Nicene or Apostle's Creed... but true mysticism is when God's presence becomes experiential and undoubted... we need the Creeds because they hold on to us here [head] until we have that experience here [heart]... but the only things we know at any deep and real level... are the things we have personally experienced...*

I thank Nadia Bolz-Weber for her Gift... for putting into words... what many of us... dare I say all of us... wrestle with inside... when we take the words of the Creeds... and what they mean... and how we interpret them... and are empowered to speak when others remain silent... or stand up when others sit down... or present a Christmas pageant about the Wise Men and the manger...

We all make the Magi's journey... we all move from belief to experience... from outside to inside... from here [head] to here [heart]... from Herod... to the Christ Light... we may sometimes need to go home another way... but we all become mystics...

Mike+