

“The Christmas Journey”

Last Sunday I was down in Georgia visiting with family at Jekyll Island, where I attended church at the Faith Chapel. This historic chapel was built in 1904. As I sat in the pew I looked beyond the preacher, beyond the small altar to the east wall, where there is a large and beautiful Tiffany stained glass window capturing “The Adoration of the Magi” -- the visit of the Three Kings, the Gospel story we hear every year on the Feast of the Epiphany. I thought how wonderful that this Christmas journey of the Wise Men is the central focus for those who worship in Faith Chapel in every season, for every event – weddings, funerals, baptisms, Holy Communion.

On the 24th/25th of December we hear Luke’s story: the journey to Bethlehem, no room in the inn, birth in the stable, the angels, the shepherds. We celebrate God coming to us in the infant Jesus, in the poorest of circumstances. God comes to us, God is with us, Emmanuel.

Today, and every year on January 6th, we celebrate Matthew’s Christmas story, the Kings travelling to the baby Jesus. Their story becomes our story. Luke’s version shows us how God comes to us. Matthew’s story shows us how we come to God. The journey of Christmas is a journey we make throughout our lives, and we see this journey in three ways.

First, we question the identity of these visitors to the baby Jesus. Are they Kings? Wise Men? Astrologers? We can ask about our own identity. Who are we? Am I a child of God? Am I defined by my job? Or my family status? The Three Kings came from the East. Where do we come from? Where are we going? They are led by a star. What leads, guides us?

I rejoice in the journey we share through life. We travel together. This is what our life at Grace Church is all about – from birth and before it to death and after it. The Christmas journey of the Wise Men reminds us of our journey. Their identity and our identity are discovered in the pursuit of faith, of truth, of understanding, of God.

Second, the Wise Men act in a very specific way when they reach their goal, the baby Jesus. They worship and they offer their gifts. Those who discover God’s love, God’s reality, know this is our basic activity in life – to worship, to adore the God of love and to offer our gifts, our treasure to help spread God’s love. We might say that there are really only two basic ways to live – to offer, to give, to share or to demand, to take, to care only for oneself.

Lastly, the story of the Three Kings teaches us to resist evil; to find another way “home” when the familiar, the comfortable, the expected way is blocked by threats of corruption, of lies, of violence, of evil. The Three Kings were men of peace and truth who were not willing to conspire with Herod and his violence. We too are called to resist all those who try to corrupt and to destroy God’s love.

The journey of Christmas doesn’t end when the 12 days of Christmas end, nor when the season of Epiphany ends. Travelling with these three mysterious, yet wonderful Kings helps us to think about our own journeys – physical, spiritual, professional, human. We are led to the light, to the glory, to God as the ancient prophet Isaiah wrote about 600 years before Jesus was born, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...”