

## **'HOME BY ANOTHER WAY'**

2<sup>nd</sup> of Christmas – Jan. 6, 2019 -- Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6

60:1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 60:2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 60:3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 60:4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. 60:5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 60:6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Matthew 2:1-12

2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2:2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 2:3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 2:4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 2:5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 2:6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" 2:7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 2:8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." 2:9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 2:10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 2:11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Every day it was the same thing. As he walked home along the second block from the school the worst of the playground bullies would step out and hassle him. He didn't really want anything, outside of the provocation to push him down so that he could prove how tough he was. He was getting tired of it, but what could he do? They didn't rent rooms in the school house. In desperation he mentioned it to his older sister. Had she been a brother he would have enlisted him in teaching the bully a lesson. But his sister was known for her brains and not her brawn. She was wise in a way that belied her years. As he poured out his story she slowly began to turn her head from side to side. She asked him how he felt when it occurred and knew that he was frightened. After listening intently she said, "oh, sweet and not so bright little brother. Why can't you see the light. It's simple really. Why don't you just go home a different way?"

Today we meet the three wanderers from the east. These magi traveling from the east in search of the first Christmas who had no real idea where they were going or what they would find once they got there, who baffled over final directions, stop and asked 'the way to go' in Jerusalem thinking where better to seek a new king than in the palace of one sitting on a throne. After they lavish their symbolic gifts, reminiscent of the prophecy of Isaiah, with Frankincense and Gold, they leave there, presumably to add their voices to those of the shepherds before them in the telling of what they have

seen and heard. Only their travel is farther and wider and the telling will meet many more ears. Gentile ears.

It all seems so Christmas Evey innocent. And yet, before they depart they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. The wise men, when feeling threatened with the wiles and the deviance of the despot Herod, chose, by a dream like suggestion to 'to go home another way.'

What a world Jesus was born into that early Christmas morning. A world in which the promise the he is to be the prince of peace is already facing the plot of one whose ego is at the same time gigantic and diminutive so that he is frightened by an infant. A king who would use these mystical and mysterious foreigners to bring him news of the child's location.

Of course for us the question is **has any** Christmas observance since that first Christmas, when the faithful have gathered to celebrate this holy birth, any different. IN every era a combination of alarms are sent out. Warnings, cautions, weather alerts, glaring traffic signs, even homeland security threat levels on the night of our dear savior's birth, are 'elevated' reminders just as a dream to the wise men that all, in spite of this birth, is not right in the world. The despotic Herods of any time since Jesus birth are politically pontificating about the fate of firstborn's and their families. The lives of firstborns and for that matter all children are held in tenuous vulnerability. Perhaps, if modern day Herods prevail, some sign posted on some border

walls, like the one that cuts across the very land of Jesus' birth may necessarily pronounce: 'sorry no room in the Inn for you. Go back the way you came.'

This sweet and innocent story becomes a warning as clear as that of the angelic dream. And the warning is find another way. Avoid the madness. Stay clear of the despotism and the power mad forces that would steal from the very heart of Christmas, that would do away with the Christ child as threat to power, to wealth, to unparalleled greed. In a few days, even his parents in a dream of their own, are warned to flee to Egypt, to find in a Gentile land the sanctuary they will not find only nine miles from the heart of their own faith. Flee now, become refugees to preserve this vital life. There will be plenty of time for warnings and sacrifice later.

As we arrived this morning we listened to James Taylor, the folk singer of many told tales, sing one of his most curious songs which is a reflection on our call, our summons to be as wise as wise men and stay clear of the foretellers of doom. It's called, "Home By Another Way" and its about being wise enough to figure out who the bad guys are so as to avoid them. The Herods of the world who only want more.

For JT and for us and the shepherds and wise men for that matter, what it all means is we reluctantly leave the manger and make our way through Epiphany, a season dedicated to the telling of good news and light bearing for

a darkened world. What say we who have visited with angels and shepherds and now these kings as we begin a new year? How do we, do our Epiphany best to proclaim that all the warnings in the world has to offer cannot change the fact that Christmas happened. That unto us a child is born, a son given, and in spite of earthly pretenders to the throne, of pompous priests, presidents and kings, the true government of human kind is upon his shoulders and he is now and always our wonderful counselor, mighty God and prince of peace.

We know that the very purpose of Herodic devilment, of despotism, and greed for power, is to disrupt life, to replace faith with fear. Fear of the other, fear of the future, fear even of ourselves. **But** we have seen the miracle birth. We have witnessed almighty God breaking in to the plane of our existence. We know that the babe of Bethlehem is the king of kings and Lord of Lords. Warnings abound, and the message is don't go there...go another way. Don't allow the Herod's of the world to win with their fear mongering and scare tactics. They do not rule. God does. And the world can pretend it does not know, but it does.

Like the wise ones of old, rather than keep on getting beat up, we are invited, encouraged, we are called to go another way. Even as the lights of Christmas find their way back to their attic resting places, a new year begins and we can take a different direction in our living, set a new course in our

faith, we can be led by the light which has come into the world to a new future. We live in a world that is still choosing to dwell in the dark .... But we can be its light. The late Ann Weems reminds us as we begin a new year

***The night is still dark  
And a procession of Herods still terrorizes the earth,  
Killing the children to stay in power.  
The world still knows its Herods,  
But it also still knows men and women  
Who pack their dreams safely in their hearts  
And set off toward Bethlehem,  
Faithful against all odds,  
Undeterred by fatigue or rejection,  
to kneel to a child.***

***And the world still knows those persons  
wise enough to follow a star,  
those who do not consider themselves too intelligent  
too powerful too wealthy  
to kneel to a child.***

***And the world still knows those hearts so humble  
that they're ready  
to hear the word of a song  
and to leave what they have, to go  
to kneel to a child.***

***The night is still dark,  
but by the light of the star,  
even today  
we can still see  
to kneel to a child.***

By the light of Christ we are led to table....