

The path of peace, illuminated

CHURCH OF SAINT CLEMENT·TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020·5 MINUTES6 Reads

Feast of the Epiphany

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January 5, 2020

In the Name of One God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

On Thursday afternoon I wrote to you all inviting you to this Epiphany service; I was so excited to preach this morning!

In my note, I wrote, “We will come to celebrate stars and lights and treasure and wisdom and new life. You don’t want to miss it!

I was having an Epiphany moment, feeling awash in divine winter light.

Unfortunately, It seemed to last just that – a moment.

It wasn’t much later that I learned of the US drone attack in Baghdad which killed top Iranian commander Soleimani, a strike that immediately raised fears that the conflict between America and Iran could escalate in dark and frightening ways.

Soon after, Iran pledged harsh retaliation over the killing.

Iraqi officials publicly condemned the US for conducting the strike on its soil. Global markets fell while oil prices shot upward.

The state department urged Americans to flee Iraq immediately.

War has a way of casting a long dark shadow over a Sunday sermon.

Of course it is only through the darkness that we are able to see the ever present stars.

Without the darkness of night, the magi could never have seen their famous star. Would never have started a journey that spanned moments and years and the same Middle Eastern geography we wage war over even today.

They were wise, discerning, brave and hopeful. If there is any moment we need the lesson of their lives to enliven our own, it is now.

They saw a star and knew something special had happened. They didn't know exactly what had happened, who was born or what the birth would mean for them and for the people of Israel, God's chosen who had endured so much, or for those of other nations (like the magi themselves) for those living in peace, for those living in war, for those living then and for those living now.

There was no way for them to know who this baby would become – there was no way to know who they would become after the divine encounter. They only knew that they must follow their star and their instinct, the spark within them that told them something - someone - new was set to rule the world.

They set out in hope and wonder. Each step of their journey illumined before them.

I wonder how many times during the years it took them to travel all that way did they want to turn back, return to the “good enough” of their lives? How many times did they lift each other up, encourage one another in their journey, tend to one another in their sickness, boredom and distress?

“The star is still there,” says one.

“Keep going.”

“I think it might even be brighter tonight.”

They take a step and then another.

They navigate their way through loss and danger, light and darkness.

Until they reach Jerusalem.

There they search for the new King – excitedly telling everyone they meet the good news and bright light that had brought them so far.

If they knew the disaster the news would incite would they have even started the journey in the first place?

Their excitement and questions lead a small man with a large ego and a tenuous grip on power to call for the death of all who threatened him and his rule. The slaughter of thousands of innocent children followed.

It was a terrible moment in history, and it followed one of the most magical.

Epiphany is a season of light, but this story in Matthew's Gospel is so so dark.

What can it mean for us today - living in a moment in which thousands are slaughtered in places around the world every day?

Was the birth of the Savior meant only for the Jewish people of Israel? Was Jesus born to be their King only? Or was he born to be King of all? Of all the suffering, hopeless, exhausted and scared?

Was the mercy and grace born in baby Jesus - our Emmanuel – our God with us – limited only to the ones anticipating his birth? Or did his light – does his light – shine on – into all the corners of darkness – all over the world – for all time?

Does the bright light of Epiphany still shine in the sky above Persia – illuminating the fields in which the grandchildren of the magi wonder today what tomorrow will bring?

Does the bright light of Epiphany still shine in the sky above us?

Though this isn't the sermon I was planning to write and this wasn't the message I was planning to give – I truly believe that the Epiphany light that shines this morning is the same light that shone in the darkness of the ancient world –

that shone through stars and sages,

in Bethlehem,

brightening a moment that would sustain an entire people through tremendous darkness –

as it does today.

The light shining in this story - in the midst of darkness - is meant for each one of us.

The magi brought gifts to the Holy Family – but the lasting gift for us – is that through them we can see the miracle of the reach of God’s saving mercy and grace – an expansive salvation for all the world.

And like them we can follow the light from God –

light shining within us

and light shining beyond us

illuminating the path before us –

and the way of peace.

Amen.