

The Sunday of Joy – Carol's reflection – Dec 13 2020

There is nothing quite like being in the height of the red zone of a global pandemic to give us a real cause to pause.

Here we are, separated from family and friends; advised (or ordered) to stay at home. The church sanctuary is mostly decorated for Christmas, but we see those decorations through photographs, and memory.

It is a strange time indeed.

Certainly, we are not the first to live through strange times – to experience things that are outside of our expectations.

Imagine what it was like for those magi in today's scripture. In our traditional understanding, the Magi were star gazers. They were waiting for the universe to reveal hidden truths to them – and there it was, a brilliant light in the sky – a star that led them to Bethlehem.

It must not have been an easy journey – no journey in those days was easy – even if they came with staff to set up tents, and cook meals, and then clean everything when the stopover was done. There was the whole issue of walking a great distance, or riding a camel – incidentally, camels are not mentioned in the biblical story – but we seem to have them firmly planted in our own images of that time.

But it was the star that was leading them. And journey they did.

The star was a symbol of the light of God – a light offering them hope. My friend Mark is an amateur astronomer in BC, and he did some research on what the magi might have seen in the sky. In 2 BC, the 2 brightest lights in the sky (after the sun and the moon) came together. The shining planets of Jupiter and Venus came so close together in orbit as viewed from earth, that they appeared to be one bright star. And, to the ancient star gazers, that bright light appeared right at the foot of the constellation that they recognized as a lion. Everything told them that this was something special.

As the planets travelled through their orbits, the light seemed to stop as the separation between them became visible.

In today's reading, the star stopping is not the loss of a great light, but rather it is the opportunity to find something. And that moment of opportunity filled them. They were overwhelmed with joy.

In ***Kneeling in Bethlehem***, Ann Weems wrote a poem called Star Giving:

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas is a star...

Brilliance in a package,
something you could keep in the pocket of your jeans
or in the pocket of your being.

Something to take out in times of darkness,
something that would never snuff out or tarnish,
something you could hold in your hand,
something for wonderment,
something for pondering,
something that would remind you of
what Christmas has always meant:
God's Advent Light into the darkness of this world.

But stars are only God's for giving,
and I must be content to give you words and wishes
and packages without stars.

But I can wish you life
as radiant as the Star
that announces the Christ Child's coming,
and as filled with awe as the shepherds who stood beneath its light.

And I can pass on to you the love
that has been given to me,
ignited countless times by others
who have knelt in Bethlehem's light.

Perhaps, if you ask, God will give you a star.

I think we need that star right now. The star that proclaims that we are not alone, and not forgotten. It is the star that assures us that God is with us, and new possibilities await.

As much as we are aware of all the losses around us, -- and there are many -- this is a time for more than just counting those things and noting the difficulty of our own journeys. It is a time for the stars to become a touchstone of grace and hope.

It is a strange time, but it can also be a good time. It is a time for us to remember to take care of one another with our calls and letters. It is a time to remember that our generous hearts will go a long way toward making the world a better place.

If it was something coming together that the magi saw as a word from God, then, maybe we, too, can see all that is coming together today in that same way. This is a time to remember that those considered the least or the lost and first and foremost. Now is the time to remember that all that surrounds #BlackLivesMatter is not a slogan, but a deep truth.

For, unto us, unto all of us, a child will be born.

Let's follow that star, that we may be overwhelmed with joy.

Thanks be to God.