

Carol's reflection – Jan 2 2022

Look up, look way, way up!

Undoubtedly that's what we say when we want to point out something extraordinary in the sky. We see something that catches us, and we want to share it.

Perhaps that was how it was for those Magi so long, long ago. See, look, wow, what is it? What does it mean?

We who do not chart our lives by the stars, or the sky, still might look to the sky and wonder.

Did you see that rainbow?

Did you see the colour of the morning sky as the light breaks in winter?

Red sun in the morning...

Red sun at night...

That was quite a sunrise or sunset!

We also use the expression that things are looking up when we want to express hope. We want to put things in a positive light – we want to move into a better time.

It is with both of those things that we can come to the Gospel of Matthew and the story of the Magi.

We see something extraordinary or we experience something as hopeful and we want to share it.

The star that appeared in the sky caught the imaginations of the Magi. That's the story that the Gospel of Matthew tells. Matthew is not about shepherds and angels singing in a field. To tell the story of the birth of Jesus is to set the stage for the mighty to come and worship.

Matthew traces the lineage of Jesus to the great forebearers of faith, and then has a star appear in the sky that is so extraordinary that Magi from far away come to worship and bring with them gold, frankincense and Myrrh – gifts fit for royalty.

The writers at Illustrated Ministry say:

At Epiphany we remember the three wise ones who followed the light of the star to find Jesus. Epiphany means "showing forth," and Epiphany begins a season where we are called to look for how God makes Godself known throughout the world.

So Epiphany is a time of looking around. It is a time to notice the gifts that surround us even in difficult times. And, in noticing the gifts, we are noticing God.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu whose life is being celebrated this weekend as the world mourns his death, had a lot to say about gifts. He believed that everyone had gifts, and that we all needed the gifts of one another.

He wrote:

God is smart, making us different so that we will get to know our need of one another. We are meant to complement one another in order to be truly human and to realize the fullness of our potential to be human. After all, we are created in the image of a God who is a diversity of persons who exist in effable unity.

(An African Prayer Book)

So perhaps God is most visible in one another. Perhaps we cast light for others by how we live our lives. And in doing so, looking up is all about things being hopeful. The world can experience more hope, peace, joy and love. The world can know justice. We can live without fear.

In his poem, Epiphany, Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote: “We are—we could be—people of your light. So we pray for the light of your glorious presence as we wait for your appearing.”

We are called to be people of light. We are called to be people who follow the star. We are called to be people of hope. That’s why we have Magi as part of the Christmas story.

The story has so many parts and each one has meaning. The angels bear the words, Fear not.

The shepherds remind us that God comes to us where we are, in all the messiness of our lives.

The Magi remind us that God calls us to follow – and to believe that the world can be different. When the Magi arrive in Jerusalem looking for the new king – they meet Herod. And Herod wants answers – who is this child who will threaten his rule?

As an aside, it’s interesting that Herod gets the answers about where to look for the Messiah from the religious leaders that surround him – but none of them have gone to look for the child themselves. The leaders who have been waiting for the Messiah do not go a few miles down the road to Bethlehem – perhaps that’s a bit of foreshadowing from Matthew about how the leaders of the day will miss the point of Jesus ministry time and time again. From day one, all the way through, they have not been open to God’s leading – even though they were official ‘leaders’!

The Magi seem to be the opposite of this. They follow the star, they find the child, and they are overwhelmed with joy.

What an image that is – to be overwhelmed with joy!

Led by the star, glimpsing a vision of God's love, they are overwhelmed with joy!

And, then, filled with joy, they dream of a new world and a new way home.

They do not return to Herod and his hunger for power at all costs. They do not even return to the religious leaders of the day. Instead, they return home – filled with the gift.

Last year we began looking around with a few words as our touchstones and reflection points. Grace, angels, neighbour, mystery, connect, peace, understanding...

Perhaps words can help us again as we enter the season of looking, of being open to the 'aha' moments of finding God's presence. Perhaps you will take on an Epiphany word, or an Advent word, and let Hope, Peace, Joy and Love guide you in this new year.

Perhaps in this Epiphany season, we can find the image of God in one another. Perhaps we can look up, look way, way up, and see the glory of God, right here, up close and personal.

God is with us, wherever we are.

Thanks be to God.

Happy New Year.