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Squamish United Church

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Readings - Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-9

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Do you Believe?

Perhaps like me you have heard this story of the wise one's journey in some fashion or another all the years of your life. Perhaps you come to epiphany with little expectation, maybe for you this day is just an annoying orthodox extension of a holiday that is already over. Or perhaps like me you have come to see epiphany as the key to the celebration of Christmas. Without this piece the story is not over.

Whether you hold the story of the wise men, magi or astrologers coming to Jesus as historic or symbolic I don't really mind but the question we are always to ask when we read the biblical text is so what does it mean for us today?

What do this story of the journey of the magi have to do with the journey of our lives? Where is it taking us? Where is the light?

One of the things about our faith is whether we are in dark times or times of light the stories are always about searching for more.

That is why this weekend at the conference "stepping out" we were asking these sort of questions for ourselves and for the church. As we listened, and learned something sparked within me about journey.

I began to realize in an epiphany sort of way that when we embark on a journey - if we really choose to step into the journey not only are we living into our faith story, but we are living in hope. And although it may feel a little blunt and a little scary I keep having the phrase "if we really believe we will live in hope" running through my mind. If we really believe we will live in hope.

Perhaps that might sound a little ironic because unless you have been hiding out somewhere really exclusive you will have heard the word believe a lot lately. Tell me what the Canadian Olympic slogan is? WE BELIEVE/I BELIEVE

Do we always believe? "Isaiah says that dark times are to be expected. The prophet proclaims that God's people are blessed with hope-filled light from the Holy one, a light to be shared, a

light that will attract other people.”¹ Do we believe that for ourselves or for our little congregation?

Dan Chambers asked in a Epiphany sermon once “What inspired the magi to make the journey?”² We know they followed a star, but why? Why would they risk such a journey. “They were, after all, traveling from the East, from Arabia or Mesopotamia, which would have been a long and hard journey of hundreds of miles, fraught with danger. Carrying expensive cargo they would have been prime targets for highway robbers.”³

Was it prestige? Honor? Fame? Were they trying to get in good with Herod? One might begin to argue that but this doesn’t make sense because they were not going to a place of prestige they were not going to see the birth of a king in a palace. For all they knew this baby would turn out to be just the cousin of a crazy baptizing evangelist who wore strange clothes.

They were on a journey to see a babe that had been born in a barn in the little town of Bethlehem. This inconvenient journey was a little crazy let’s be honest. So something in them must have been living in hope. A part of them must have believed there was something more out there. And somehow they must have been drawn towards the presence of light even in the midst of a very dark world and time.

Whatever the reason for their journey we know one thing for sure - something Holy was taking place. Because no matter how you read this story it is a story about encountering something holy, something that is extraordinary and connects us to the deepest and truest parts of God and ourselves. This is a story that finds a way to connect the heavens and the earth, the divine and the human. We know this because as they arrived at this place to meet this child those who would normally be honored did the honoring. Because the story tells us that when they arrived in that place they were overwhelmed with joy. And when they saw Mary and Jesus they knelt down and paid him homage. And then they gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These wise ones were not on a journey towards individual recognition and fame they were on a journey of self-sacrifice, emptying and a search for the divine.

What took them on their journey was a hope-filled expectance to encounter the holy. Dan says “In their wisdom, the magi journeyed to Bethlehem in order to know that which grounds all experience. The deep called the deep within the magi, and they journeyed to encounter that which is beyond time;” and space and the world which they had come to know.

The magi went on a journey of hope-filled discovery and I would venture to say that in their sacred encounter with this holy family their lives were changed. “If they didn’t know this

¹ Gathering Jan 6 Epiphany 2010

² Chambers Dan, Jan 2, 2000 sermon

³ IBID

before, they knew after encountering Jesus that God pervades all things.” If you met them on their journey home and asked them what they saw they might have glowed with holy faces themselves as they shared of the child they had just met from God, a “child who reminded them that God is with us in all things.” If you had looked confused they might have told you a parable “We are like a fish in water. The fish, by all appearances, is not conscious of the water that surrounds them. It is their environment, they swim in it and eat from it, are born in it and die in it but are apparently unaware of the water itself. Take the fish out of the water, and they die. Fish are totally dependent upon water. Like the fish, we are totally dependent upon God for our very existence. Like the water, God surrounds us and is so intimate with us, we might forget to notice.” and then they would have leaned forward to make the point “Everything is bathed in God.”⁴

But what of the journey? What does it mean for us today?

Honestly, absolutely nothing if we are not willing to go on the journey with them. If we let others take the journey because they have the time or are more qualified, or perhaps we think they need it more. If we sit back and want to encounter this presence by just listening to words we will not be changed, we will not notice that in which we live and move and have our being as Paul said.

If we just let the magi take this journey it becomes nothing more than a cute little story with figurines that we put up every December. We will not know what brought the magi to the child if we do not consider what brings us towards sacred and holy times and places. We will not know unless we choose to believe and live in hope.

We will not know unless we begin to wonder what brings us closer to who we are created to be. We will not know what brought them to the child unless we know what brings us to choose to live courageously when we find our own star beckoning.

If we set our eyes on the light of hope the journey of the wise men will become our story and we will see what they say we may even begin to kneel before the miracle of each new day and we may begin to choose to offer gifts out of the amazing gifts of ourselves and we will begin to live knowing everything is bathed in God.

So let us be encouraged in this New Year - with an amazing faith and hope-filled journey ahead to “commit ourselves to seeking out where Christ may be found, even if it’s inconvenient (like the Magi’s long and dangerous journey). Even if it disturbs the status quo (like the Magi’s visit to Herod). Even if it is costly (like the offering of gifts). Let us be open to the encounter with Christ who will change our direction (just as the Magi went home another way -because they could no longer live in the dark). Let us be encourage to live into the light - to believe and live in hope.

I Believe...do you believe?

⁴ Chambers