

Have Courage to Follow the Light of Hope January 7th, 2024

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our guiding star,
Amen.

For over ten years, at our house after bedtime prayers, we've been singing the same song-
*Love is something if you give it away, give it away,
You wind up having more!*

And it has served us very well. It has perfect theology. So, a few months ago, when our second child arrived, at five years old- after bedtime prayers, we sang,
Love is something if you give it away...

It's hard joining a new family when you're five. And something that made it even harder for our little one- was – I could not understand what he was saying in the beginning - And he was so frustrated by that. But he didn't give up on me. One night after supper, I knew he was really trying to say something important- so I made a point of listening really, really hard, and asking lots of questions - And finally- I got it.

He said- "I don't want you to sing, Love is something if you give it away at bed time- anymore." He said – "I want Twinkle Twinkle." And when I figured it out, both of us were overjoyed! Changing a bedtime song is a small thing, and very easy to do, but this moment represented something bigger for the life of our family, understanding that we are being asked to *sing a new song* represents the new journey that we are on. It represents an opportunity for us to challenge our practices, and to ask if they are still serving us. It represents a moment to do things we have never thought of doing before, to listen to the needs of our littlest one, and be transformed.

Twinkle, Twinkle, comes from the first stanza of the poem, "The Star" published by Jane Taylor in 1806, In her poem, we hear the words:

*Then the trav'ller in the dark,
thanks you for your tiny spark,
he could not see which way to go,
if you did not twinkle so.*

I don't know if Jane Taylor meant for this song to remind us of the wise men from today's gospel, but her father was a minister, and like us, she was steeped in the tradition of scripture. And our Gospel today is one of the most magnificent stories we have – isn't it?

The magi are from the Gospel of Matthew, and show up when Jesus and his mother are in a house- they've moved on from the stable. But we love the wise men so much, we put them right there beside the donkey and the shepherds from Luke's gospel every chance we get. They can be called Wise Men, or Magi, or even astrologers -if you have a fancy new inclusive bible, we also call them kings, probably because some believe they fulfill the ancient prophecies that we heard this morning in the Hebrew Bible, from the prophet Isaiah,
Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

And from the Psalm,

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts. All kings shall bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.

We thought –if Jesus is the Messiah we’ve been waiting for, then these wise men must be the kings from other nations that were scheduled to visit. They were certainly important, if not actual kings, because they were able to have an audience with Herod. Today we remember also that the story of the travellers and the twinkling star and the splendid gifts, will take a gruesome turn in the very next verses. It was the wise men who tipped off King Herod – that a new leader had been born threatening his power. So even though the wise ones were too wise to go back and tell Herod the location of the child he knew the little king had arrived,

Herod flew into a rage and ordered that all the babies two years old and under should be killed. And just as the Magi had been warned in a dream to take a new road home, Joseph was warned in a dream to run. To take the family to Egypt and to hide from Herod.

As Christians, when we think of Egypt we might also think of Moses. One of the number one heroes of the bible. Moses’ life is a sort of reflection or a foreshadowing- of Jesus’ life. When Moses was a baby, the Pharaoh carried out an evil plan to kill children- just like Herod did in Jesus’ time. Moses’ mom protected him by putting him in the basket in the river, just like Mary and Joseph protected the baby Jesus. And Moses grew up to bring freedom from slavery and killing and exploitation and oppression for the children of Israel. So Jesus’ life’s mission would also be about freedom, an end to violence, and to bring hope to the lives of the oppressed.

One of the important messages of the feast of Epiphany that we celebrate today, with the story of the magi, and what makes Jesus different than Moses, is that Jesus did not come, *only* for the Israelites. Jesus’ hope is to transform the face of the *whole earth*. In the words of the psalm...

He shall deliver the poor who cry out in distress, and the oppressed who has no helper.

He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; he shall preserve the lives of the needy.

He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

How I wonder what you are.

Twinkle Twinkle little star,

How I wonder what you are.

We don’t know if the Wise Men’s star was a comet, or a supernova, or an angel, but I believe it’s possible that the star that guided the Magi, the mysterious moving target - is hope. The hope that all the people of the earth share - the universal hope for a better world - that Jesus represents.

I wonder if that hope is still our distant, guiding star? The hope that all our children may be safe from violence, that all of us can someday be free from oppression and exploitation. The hope for a world where kings no longer trample and destroy the lives of the poor.

Today, I wonder if that was hope, that shone so bright that it inspired wise people to pack up camels and journey into the unknown.

This Christmas, I came across a message from a person in Gaza - I have a slide of his message – so maybe we could post that now? Mohammed Matter said-

Dear Christian Friends,

I receive a lot of messages from you saying you are not celebrating this year because of Gaza.

Please celebrate,

enjoy your time and think of Gaza.

Please hug your family members,

love them and enjoy your time as much as you can.

If there is a thing we've learned during this time, it's that Family is most important.

Please do it for us, for the people of Gaza.

We love you and we want you to be happy.

Here again, a wise person from the East, has illuminated the truth at the heart of our own faith that God came to earth as a child in a family, the littlest in the house, a poor one, a vulnerable one, an innocent one. Mohamed Matter's words reminds us, that peace and freedom, safety and abundant life will never come to the earth for any of us, if we neglect the love and care of that one. As Christians, we remember today, that when we put that person first, we will find ourselves singing new songs and taking new roads and leaving old places and ideas behind.

And if we have the courage to follow the light of hope for all people that Jesus offers us, if we have the courage to follow that star, we will be transformed, so that we, and All God's children may be free. Amen.

Rev. Emily Carr