January 6th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

The Quest of the Magi

I. All on a Journey

I was sitting in the dentist’s chair one afternoon before Christmas, and as I was waiting, there was a sign that said, ‘Wise men still seek him now.’ At first, admittedly, I was a bit surprised that a secular business had the sign up, but once I got past that part, I sat there thinking, “Yeah, wise women and men are still seeking him now, because we are all seeking something.”

I must admit, I’ve always been attracted to ‘seekers’, to people who are discontent with world and are seeking answers. I’m probably attracted to those seekers because I am one myself – I’m always on a journey, always searching, ever debating, constantly discerning, what I believe to be true and what I do not. I love the seekers who have been searching all their lives and those who start today, because as God’s people, I believe we are all called to question.

I remember watching those seekers on a benches on Iona, deeply in thought, deeply wondering. I remember wondering what they were wondering – what big questions they were trying to get at – what quest they were on in thinking about their faith. After all, we are all seekers in some way or another – we are all on a universal quest for meaning and have a spiritual hunger to know more and to understand the call on our lives.

II. The Wise Men

In our Scripture passage from the Gospel of Matthew today, we see the famed ‘Wise Men’ who were thought to be kings. As a side note, Matthew never calls them Kings – that thought comes from Isaiah 60 or Psalm 72. And they have been termed ‘wise men’, but the Magi are folks who were most likely from Babylon, which was the hub of ancient astrological studies. So, they are star seekers, and their quest is to follow the prophecy they know and have heard all their lives – to follow that star.

Let us also know that the way our liturgical or Biblical calendar is laid out could make it seem as if these Magi went alone, but chances are they had extra servants and supplies. It also might seem like it would have taken a few weeks for them to get to Bethlehem, but the truth is that the journey would have taken months, not weeks. These were committed seekers, not drifters, who were following the promise of a star for months on end. One might wonder – did they ever look up at the star and think about going home? How did they keep up their energy and their wonder at what was to come?

The Magi would be strong model believers for us to follow today, ever seeking, ever on a quest, wandering and wondering to get closer to the truth. When they come to the manger and offer gifts, they offer gifts of luxury, and true generosity. They offer gold because it is an appropriate gift for a king. They bring frankincense because it represents divinity. They offer myrrh, to testify to the Son of Man who was born to die. We do not know how much the Magi offered of each gift, but it would be fair to say that these gifts were not something they just picked up at the village market. They would be expensive gifts, freely given, for a King in a Cradle.

III. Epiphany Moments

Today, we celebrate the day when the Magi met Jesus and gave him these generous gifts. We celebrate the very moment of ‘epiphany’ – which is a revelation, a moment of awe and wonder. And this epiphany is just one of the many epiphanies to come. The revelation of Jesus as God’s Son in the baptismal waters, the works and wonders and miracles that are to come, and the resurrection – all epiphany, revelation, transformative moments that makes any seeker, young or old, seasoned or new, stand in complete awe.

For you, and for me, are Epiphanies a thing of the past? Are the only epiphanies, or these moments of revelation, to be found sealed in the Bible? The word ‘epiphany’ has been wrapped up in this scene with these wise men, but at its core, at its definitive meaning, do we see epiphanies in our lives?

IV. Where we find our Epiphanies

For the seekers sitting in the pews, I think we do still have moments of epiphany. There is a reason you are here this morning. On a Sunday morning, when most folks work from Monday to Friday, 9-5, you could choose to be somewhere else. You could be on your couch, sipping a cup of coffee, watching the Today show, PJs on and comfortably snuggled up. Yet, on your day off, on your free day, you choose to be in these pews. No one has forced you to be here. So what brings you here? What questions, what longing, what seeking, has drawn you to the pew to sit and listen and sing and learn?

I think, for me, there have been epiphany moments along the way, and to recognize them is important. An epiphany moment, is a moment of wonder, revelation, complete transformation where how I interpret the world changes and how I interact with it changes as well. I remember becoming a youth elder and the laying on of hands, unable to describe how and why that felt so sacred. I remember climbing a mountain at Montreat in North Carolina and looking out to a vastness I had never experienced before. I remember sitting in an Abbey from the 900s, completely overwhelmed and silenced by the feeling of how many saints throughout the years had sat where I sat, and the feeling of community, both living and dead, that made this place an ‘epiphany’ place. I may have not met Jesus at the manger, but in my seeking, I met him in my heart in moment that are indelibly etched in my memory.

V. The Challenge for the Week

As we celebrate Epiphany, I have two challenges for you this week and beyond. There’s the traditional challenge that comes up every year – when you pick up a star and see a word. Put that star in a place where you will see it every day and instead of New Years Resolutions, seek to live out that word in the ways that God offers you throughout the year. For instance, my word last year was ‘boldness’ – which for the record, is a dangerous word for a Jersey girl – but in boldness I shared my eating disorder story last year, in boldness I said yes to changes in our worship setting from new hymn books to a new sound system, and in boldness, I voiced my thoughts, gratitude, and concerns to the Presbytery, believing that epiphanies happen in this every day work. So, whatever word you have this year, use it, live it, breathe it in and try to live it out. Do not let it be daunting, but rather, let it be a gift – a gift of exploring a new way to understand the world around you.

The second challenge follows from the first, and it is this – as I have told you my epiphany moments that come to mind, I would like you to sit down and write down your ‘epiphany’ moments. Write down why you are here. Write down what has shaped you and transformed you to be who you are in this very moment. And then pray, and give thanks, for the epiphanies of old and of today, that embolden us to be the body of Christ in the world. Amen.