

Knowing in uncertain times

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

January 3, 2021

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Have you ever done something on faith? Maybe it was a project or piece of art you needed to try, a journey you needed to make, or, perhaps it is a loved one whose passion just bursts as they talk about something they want to do. Also, it might be risky, it might not make logical sense. You journey based on faith, trust.

I've been on a few of those journeys of faith. Some have proven to be a powerful experience. Others, well, maybe not so much. I think that there is a deep down knowing that defies rational thinking at times; you trust your instincts. I imagine those magi, however many there were, friends laughing at them as they announce that they were embarking on a journey based on their research.

The scholars of stars, probably of Zoroastrian, Eastern tradition, forge out on a journey to pay homage to an infant Jewish king.

Mythology has piled onto mythology about these wise ones. My favourite hymn since childhood has been "We Three Kings" – but, there is no evidence that they were kings, and we only infer that there are three of them. The story doesn't tell us. Christian tradition is captivated about these foreigners, they come from away from a Jewish perspective. After their long journey they are beckoned by egotistical Herod, disingenuous, cunning, but also, as Matthew will soon tell us, terrified of this story going around based in Hebrew prophetic tradition that a child king will be born, more powerful than Rome.

What a journey. I'm still on my journey of faith, serving in ministry in the church. My past 20+ years in ministry have proven that I can have little, often no, idea what lays ahead. I journey in faith, and hope. How about you? Are you on some kind of journey of faith?

Matthew, the only one who tells of the wise ones' journey, offers two very interesting specifics in today's Gospel.

First, this story breaks down boundaries. You see, it is not Jewish leaders, not locals, who are grounded in Isaiah's prophecy of a Messiah being born in Bethlehem, who make pilgrimage to the manger. It is foreigners from a vastly different religious background who see the signs, and follow a star, and who journey in faith to honour this child with precious gifts.

To me this proclaims that God's love reaches way, way beyond our comfortable inner social, ethnic, gender, or religious circles – to call absolutely anyone and everyone to become a hero in God's salvation history. As we gather shortly at God's banquet table, Communion, let us remember that it is unconditionally welcoming of all who seek.

Finally, the second important point Matthew makes in this story; that in a dream the magi are warned not to go back to Herod, so they go home by another road. They are changed by this experience. They follow a way of knowing that defies the logic of science. Something deeper, larger transcends the usual routines, and they are gifted with something new. They witness a birth, but something is born in them.

We have come from 2020, for many of us a harrowing year. We have endured loss, isolation, grief, sometimes anger this year. But perhaps we have also been gifted with some things. I have witnessed the resilient spirit of human beings, and kindness that I have rarely seen, and hopefulness. In the face of uncertainty – COVID outbreaks, lockdown, then relief from quarantine regimen. We have learned to wash our hands fastidiously. To notice in others and express happiness with our eyes, even when we are wearing masks.

We have heard the refrain, “We are in this together.” We groan inwardly, it seems cliché, but we have learned that we need hope; that deep down knowing, in the face of uncertain days ahead, knowing that we will get through this together. May we remember those foreigners who dared to make a journey; they saw holiness revealed to them, and did not go home the same way.