



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Epiphany – January 6, 2019: The Meteor and the Lower Road

For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.

As we gather this morning to honor Queen Emma on the Feast of the Epiphany, I find myself wondering how Her Majesty would call us to live into this passage from this morning's gospel. How would she have us observe the star, follow the star, and pay homage to the Christ child whom we find at its end?

We can't know for sure, but I'd like to think that Queen Emma would call us to think about our lives in the Hawaiian Islands and to know and feel how being in this special place enhances our charge to live into and carry out the gospel message by loving ourselves, loving God, and loving others—and to know that we are blessed.

We live in a place, after all, that affords us the opportunity to take in the comets and stars that appear in the night sky, Hawaii being prime real estate for astronomy.

I recall two times in my life, both on Hawaii Island, where I took in the sight of comets in the night sky. In 1986 my grandparents and I went to the top of Mauna Kea in our four-wheel drive and took in Halley's Comet, and in 1997 we sat on my mother's lanai in Puako and peered through binoculars at the Hale-Bopp Comet.

But I have to say that the most dramatic night time quote/unquote star at its rising, for me, was in 1984 when my mother and I were driving home to Honokaa from Kailua-Kona late one night. We were on the Queen Kaahumanu Highway, the lower road, at about midnight when all of a sudden, the sky lit up in neon blue and I could see Kohala Mountain and Haleakala in right front of me. Then the sky dimmed and a meteor with a tail flew over Mauna Kea and the sky turned dark again.

News reports the next day reported a meteor had been sighted that night. Mauna Loa had been erupting for several days and we could see the red glow in the night sky. Hawaiian legend says that when Pele moves from one home to another, she does so in the form of a meteor. Soon after this event, Kilauea began to erupt simultaneously with Mauna Loa and then Mauna Loa stopped.

So, to me it's totally plausible that the wise men saw something in the sky 2000 years ago — something that they chose to follow. In the desert 2000 years ago, I'd have probably done the same thing. So for me, I don't need to get caught up in whether or not this could have happened. I'm confident that based on personal experiences of my own that it probably did.

And what's actually more interesting to me, more significant, is that they found Jesus, offered gifts, and protected him from the jealous rage of Herod. And it's not so much about whether that actually happened. There's no historical evidence, after all, of the Slaughter of the Innocents. What I find fascinating is that they did what they could to keep Jesus alive, even if it meant telling white lies to the likes of King Herod.

“Our beloved Church regards her children as having bodies as well as souls to be cared for, and sanctions the consecration of these and all that is beautiful in nature and art to the service of God.” . . . - Queen Emma.

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In seminary I learned a very technical word and that word was *anamnesis*. The best definition I have for the word anamnesis is that it is bringing to the present and making real in the here and now things that are reported about long ago. At the Eucharist, for example, we don't relive the Last Supper and the Road to Emmaus, we bring it to the here and now and make it come alive in our hearts and in our lives today. And so, it bears asking, "How do we bring this story into our lives today? How do we keep Christ alive in our hearts and in our lives?" To cite Christian author and theologian Rob Bell, perhaps Christ is alive and in our midst when we realize four things—that we are worthy, valued, loved, and saved.

When we believe we are worthy, we know that we have merit and that we are useful. That can be a countercultural notion in a world that uses putdowns and demeans people in order to keep power and maintain control. How many times do we hear or have we heard things like: Who do you think you are? You're not all that! They need to be put in their place! Those may be the words of a lower power whereas Christ calls us into a new awareness, the awareness that we have merit and that we are useful to God. We are worthy.

When we believe we are valued, we know that we are admired, appreciated, beloved, and cherished. The lower power will work against that notion and allow self-doubt to creep into our hearts so that we don't believe any of it. Have you ever noticed, for example, how hard it is to take a compliment and how we immediately go to self-deprecation when we receive them? That's the work of the lower power. Christ, on the other hand, calls us into the awareness that we are admired, appreciated, beloved and cherished. We are valued.

When we believe we are loved, we know that we are not just good enough. More than that we know that we are wanted and desired by God. That's why I love the Episcopal Church so much, why I believe it saved my life. When I walked through the doors of the church in 1996 the church didn't just accept me, they wanted me and that made me realize that God wanted me. The notion that I couldn't and wouldn't belong to the club was the work of lower forces. Christ was persistent and called me into the awareness that I was desired, unconditionally, just the way I was. We are loved.

And when we know those things, we are saved. We can stop killing the Christ within us like Herod tried to do. No more self-doubt. No more self-deprecation. And then we can stop killing the Christ around us like Herod tried to do. No more reading others' pedigrees and taking their moral inventories. No more putting other people in their place. And then the Christ that lives in each of us, like the Baptismal Covenant says, that Christ is protected by us. He thrives. And we are saved.

And then what do we do with all of that? Our Baptismal Covenant tells us what to do. We seek and serve Christ in all persons and we respect the dignity of every human being. And the key to that, my friends, is compassion. That's what Jesus was all about. We enter into the joy and into the pain of one another, share it, and take it on as our own—or at least recognize what's going on in the lives of our brothers and sisters. We stay connected and interconnected, no differentiation, no slave or free, Jew or Greek. And in doing that, we keep love alive and if God is love, that's a gift to the Christ child far better than frankincense, myrrh or gold.

And then the words in the gospel become not only the words of the wise men, but also the words of all of us, of all humankind. And perhaps that is the gift we can leave Queen Emma this morning — to remember the words and set them on our hearts as a people who believe we are indeed worthy,

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valued, loved, and saved—and perhaps this morning, we offer them to her as a testimony of our faith in the Cathedral that she worked so hard to leave with us:

For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.

Amen.