

A Star Is Born Isaiah 6: 1-6

For the better part of two months now we have heard various forms of what is now known as seasonal music on our radios, televisions, cd players and Ipods. It was a wide mix, ranging from those that are strictly secular in nature, tunes like Frosty the Snowman, Jingle Bells and John Lennon's Imagine, to those that are most sacred – Handel's Messiah, O Holy Night, Silent Night, Joy to the World and the foreboding carol we sang earlier- We Three Kings. The songs that we sing, the gifts that we bring, the extra effort most people make to be polite to one another all serve to remind us the Advent and Christmas seasons are indeed the most wonderful time of the year. Though in the secular world Christmas suddenly stops on December 26, our celebration continues through Epiphany. As we begin the New Year together, it is easy to look at the signs and symbols of Christmas like we see a snowstorm in April- we are tired of them already and want to move on to something else.

Once December 26 arrives, all the planning, buying, decorating, cooking and eating comes to an end. The season of giving gives way to the season of exchanging. Unless we made out our wish lists with the exact color, sizes and brand of something we want or ask for the gift that fits everyone perfectly- cash, we travel to the store, gift receipt in hand, seeking to exchange or return it for something that will make us happy. Some retailers report that their busiest day of the year is the day after Christmas, because so many people just can't wait to return their gifts that weren't quite right.

It can be a major letdown, especially when 3 months of snow and cold lie ahead. It seems that those of us living in the 21st century no longer experience the mystery of the season. Unlike the Magi of old, there seems little need to follow the Star of Bethlehem for we already know where it ends and why. Like reading a mystery novel or watching a scary movie for the second time, it is not quite as interesting as the first. It's not as much fun to open a package when you already know what is inside, although some of us mystery solvers do enjoy considering the size shape and weight of the box and accurately predicting what is inside before we tear off the wrapping paper.

It is human nature to want to have our desires met and to have our questions answered, and when we don't get exactly what we want – whether it is something we have just unwrapped from under the tree or a satisfactory answer to a difficult question, we tend to be either disappointed or angry. But even if we are successful in exchanging it, getting the replacement just isn't as much fun as opening the original on Christmas morning. The mystery is gone.

Speaking of gifts, imagine the bewilderment Mary had on her face when she opened the door that day. Just when things were getting back to normal- the Christmas decorations were put away, the few remaining cookies were tossed in the trash, the last pine needle had been swept up, just when she convinced herself that her young Son was a typical baby there was a knock at the door and opening it she sees a large delegation in the street. In spite of the song we just sang most historians believe it was not three kings on camels but a caravan of several dozen or more Gentiles that had traveled from the area we know as Iran and Iraq, nearly 600 miles from Bethlehem to see the Christ.

Just when she thought things were back to normal her life was interrupted. Not by an angel or shepherds, this time it was by a royal delegation of foreign dignitaries, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh-gifts fit for a king, God and sacrifice. Certainly she wondered what this all meant. She would not completely understand until some thirty years later when the mystery of Christmas was solved by the miracle of Easter.

The mystery of how God would redeem a fallen and sinful people begins at Christmas with the birth of our heavenly Star- the one we know as Jesus Christ and ends on Easter Sunday with His resurrection from the dead. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that our light has come, that we are people who have seen the light of Christ in a world filled with great darkness. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us, much like the star of old appeared to the wise men. The church has a mighty responsibility to make sure His majesty and mystery are not lost to the secular world. Wise men and women still seek Him.

Our primary purpose for being here on earth is to glorify Him, and perhaps like Mary we might need someone or something to interrupt our daily routine from time to time to remind us of our calling. It's not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others- perhaps even those we aren't able to see.

John Wesley once said that the church is the theatre of divine wisdom. Today he might say we need some acting lessons. So as we continue to follow our Star of Wonder in this New Year, let us do it with a sense of optimism and excitement, with a sense of glorious wonder and hope. Let's look for opportunities to interrupt our routine and continue to be God's messengers, allowing others to see the glory and wisdom of God through us. Let us continue our mission of transforming the world for Jesus Christ, until such a time when our Royal Star reappears in the sky once again for the final time. Amen