

Community Presbyterian Church

Jan 10, 2017

Texts: Isaiah 43:1-7, Luke 3:15, Acts 8:14ff

To preach just after Christmas is almost as hard as to preach just after Easter, and it is especially hard after the powerful memories of December 2015 are still settling down somewhere as I store away the powerful images, especially of the beauty of our church this season and the power of the messages delivered here by Jan and our choir. I have not yet packed away my album for 2015, nor have I taught a class yet, thanks to the longer break this year. On the phone I got the passage from Isaiah that I was to read, by calling Tricia's number and getting Michelle's support. The lectionary gave us the title "fear not Oh Jacob" and the hymns are our favorites.

A story of the other wise man, now imagined as a woman, has inspired me for many years, and now like the struggle to get to Bethlehem still haunts my imagination, never quite getting there has led me to imagine that the identity of the wise visitors, who also arrived weeks after the shepherds had long gone back to their sheep.

We may have packed away the Christmas decorations, enjoyed the rain, snow and beautiful mountains, but imagine that some travelers are still on their way, they had a long way to come. Perhaps these visitors from afar were not a Persian, a Greek, or a Chinese all of whom knew about astronomy and new stars. Maybe we could consider them as visitors in time and not in space.

So let's imagine that the wise men, according to Matthew 2:1-16, having had a long journey from China, India and Babylon, all met at the great palace of King Herod, was not at all

prepared for their visit, and he knew nothing of the prophecies of a king other than himself. We can note that already written down was the Prophecy of Micah 5:2 about the birth “a ruler who shall come to govern Israel, so he asked his own wise men from his own court, and discovered it was to Bethlehem, so he sent the wise men from the East there, and asked them to come back and tell him what they had found.

Now let’s imagine that the three wise men were “ghosts” from the past. I was inspired this week several times to ponder the role of the Holy Ghost whom we meet in our affirmations of the Apostles Creed, or indeed the Nicene Creed also in our hymn books. The Holy Ghost or spirit appears also in the lexionary this week, as he came to the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist whom Mathew George preached about last month, and the Holy Spirit went to the

apostles soon after Jesus' death.



But travel with me back in time, not just 2000 years to the birth of Jesus, but another 600 years when three wise men lived. One was Confucius who lived in what is now called China, and the Buddha who lived in what is now India and Isaiah who lived in Babylon which was ruled by the Persians. Imagine that they all managed to escape from where their bones were resting, and gather together in Herod's courtyard, not having arrived by camel, a regular and ordinary form of travel in their own and Herod's time as "ghosts" or spirits who were following a star. Perhaps ghosts who shared their messages with their disciples could come back in new and exciting manifestations especially when they were on the same wave links as stars, who revisit

the earth from time to time.



We are now at the court of Herod, shocked for he knew none of the three. Trying to be polite, he took off his hat and said, **“Welcome ye wise men of the East. What has brought you to Jerusalem now in the days of Caesar Augustus. Have you passed through Damascus, where Quirinius is Ruler of Syria (Luke 2:1)?**

No, responded the first of the wise men. My name is Kong-tzu, (later to be Romanized as Confucius). I have been awakened after 600 years of rest in my burial mound in China by a bright star and summoned here to your kingdom to a birth of a King. I gave advice to rulers in several kingdoms in my years traveling from place to place as needed. This trip to Jerusalem is the longest journey I have ever imagined, but I have always responded to requests to travel. I did not come by camel, buy I flew by celestial navigation over the high mountains and deserts at the speed of light. As I traveled I was given some gold to take to the new King, and I remembered advice I gave to people in my era. I told them to focus on the Five Relationships.

I will take this wisdom to the new king, and maybe you could also use it King Herod.

Remember your mother and father, your parents, and treat them with respect and obedience to their will. Perhaps this new king born here this month, on a journey with his parents will come to treasure his father and mother in their care for him. He must learn to obey, if he is later to give commands to his followers, to go to the whole world.

Remember all elder people, for they are worth your respect, for they have lived longer than you and have wisdom stored up. I have seen the wise men of your court and I heard them tell you that the prophecy of the birth of the new babe is just a short distance away in Bethlehem. Obviously you have wisdom to be gained from your wise men, Listen now to the advice we shall go to share with the babe and his parents.

Remember those younger than you, not only your brothers and sisters but all people, Treat the with JEN, or humanness. Do not treat those you rule with violence in order to keep control, But this new king born here will bring humanness especially to those who are poor, for I also was born to be an orphan and knew the bitter taste when there is little food in the household.

I taught my followers to seek relationships outside the family, especially to older friends and those of the same age, for it is important to have friends among you equals, for a relationship of sharing can take place and equal affirmations of between friends. Do you have friends, Herod? I would guess that the new babe will have many friends in his life ahead.

Another of my relationships to ponder is that of ruler to subject. You Herod may think the relationship would be such as to make your subjects obedient to you, and therefore you would want to use it in your kingdom. Those who will follow the will and teachings of the new king born this month in Bethlehem will learn that something are in the power of a king, and others are now within a king's power, thus we are well to render what is due to a ruler and what is NOT. Moreover, You have had great kings like David and Solomon who ruled from the place. It would be well for you to learn from them the limits of a kings power as you try to follow in their footsteps.

Herod began to look puzzled as he pondered the advice just given by Confucius. He asked, **could you give me that last relationship? I liked hearing about David and Bathseba.**

Then Confucius said, "Take it easy, Heriod, go have a rest now.

Then a second wise man stepped forward. Let me introduce myself. I am Siddhartha Gautama, sometimes called by my title "the Buddha" or the enlightened one. My father was the king of



our land in the

shadows of the Himalaya Mountains. I too was born to be a king, and wise men went to my father, looked at the light of promise and told him I would be more than a king, I would become a sage of the world, to travel and teach. Now some 24 generations of people have been born and re-incarnated, and I have come back to this earth in several places, in Tibet, in Japan and I am “an old soul” who comes to you as the 25th human manifestation of the ancient teachings I learned. My followers have come to use the symbol of a wheel, with 8 spokes to teach the noble 8 fold noble path. Perhaps you might learn from it and many will believe that my teachings with have some connection with the teachings of the new king born this month. Perhaps the new king whom we have come to meet will appreciate the gold that I bring him, for my father’s court was very rich and I have enjoyed giving away what was given to me. But wisdom is more valuable than gold, so I will not only share the wisdom I have learned, but I will try to communicate it later to the new king. He need not travel to India to learn what I teach, in fact I might imagine that he came to this earth bringing same wisdom that has been in his pre-existmentnt mind. But let me share.

First we need the right understanding (Samma-ditthi) Right might suggest truth, no lying).

Second we need Right Thought (Samma Sankappa) using our brains in good thoughts

Third, is the Right Speech (Samma-vaca) is the important way we use our mouth to speak.

Fourth is Right Action (Samma Kammanatta from the word Karma) What we do is who we are, and I feel that the new king in Bethlehem will leave a record of action that many will wish to understand and follow

Fifth, is Right Livelihood (Samma-ajiva) would be what we do in life, the new King may already

know the role of a teacher and of the sacrifice and abuse that sometimes comes to those of us who wander and teach.

Sixth is Right Effort (Samma-vayama) almost like the idea of “carry on” keep showing the energy necessary to help others and guide them even when we are weary. The New king will feel the need for such power. I trust he was born with it.

Seven is right mindfulness(Samma-sati) is probably something the new King will have been born with, and perhaps when we get to Bethlehem we will see it his eyes, even before he begins to use the words of your country to speak such as to bless those who are poor in spirit, as I have tried to do

Eight is right concentration (Samma Samadhi) is a lifetime experience with some meditation suggested, but we must move on Herod. We know the road to Bethlehem, see you later.

Now as we leave, the last of the wise men is one you must have known, as Isaiah.

I am Isaiah in Babylon who lived six hundred years ago inspired by the same God who had created the world, and through the Holy Spirit I heard the voice from the Lord to speak in Babylon to the captive peoples who had lived there for two generations now, and they were called by the name of the Patriarch “Jacob” the father of 12 sons and one daughter, who had been successful in the command to be fruitful and multiply and now the 13 had become thousands We are now in in Bethlehem that they have now after many centuries been redeemed. They would have known they were children of Jacob, they were from Nazareth, one of the cities of ancient Israel, and they would have been reassured that they were known by name by the Lord (YHWH). Perhaps they would have passed through rivers or streams to get to Bethlehem and they would have known by Him, and would have known of him as he spoke through the words I

wrote (“Ani YHWH EloheyKa, Qedosh yisrael Moshi”eka) I am the Lord, your God, The Holy one of Israel, Your Savior. Joseph and Mary will recognize the words, even from coming back from 6 centuries ago, as being the same God who was indeed the babe they were protecting. Isaiah knew in Babylon the exiles in the 6th Century would be going HOME to Jerusalem as indeed Jeremiah knew from the reading last week on which Jan spoke.

Would Joseph and Mary have understood of Isaiah had told them as he offered his gift of gold, frankincense and myrr along with his gift of encouraging words that the children of Jacob have been ransomed. Would Joseph and Mary that Egypt soon they were going soon to Egypt or how it was part of the ransom.

The Lord had me write” You are precious (YaQretah) in my eyes and I love you (ahabetka)”

Again, like the angels said to the shepherd, I wrote, “Fear not for I am with you. “I will bring your offspring from the East.” I had lived in Babylon which was East of Bethlehem, about a thousand miles, and as Isaiah, I could hope for a soon return to our peoples. The promise is much greater than a single individual, but to all those who were dispersed and were bring brought back together. But now Joseph and Mary, take the babe and go to Egypt. Herod is wicked and will try to harm you. Flee at once to Egypt.

In conclusion, we can be sure that the Prophets under the name of Isaiah, said many things that would be relevant to Jews and their return, for those who wrote the New Testament for Christians the words could have been understood by Jesus parents, and perhaps even of him

As he grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with his fellow and with God who had created the world, who as the Holy Spirit had KNOWN Mary of Nazareth, and as “the seed” who was already with God, now became a babe in Bethlelem.

Here we may observe that Most scholars George Adam Smith, Isaiah II (1896) the oldest book on Isaiah in the U. of R. Library and David W. Baker Isaiah (2013) my newest book on Isaiah would be surprised that I am using the voice and message of the Lord in the 6th Century to Isaiah as a First Century vistor to Bethlehem and the manger. But I am enjoying the challenge. Isaiah is a better name than the ones created in the Medieval era.