

A Few Thoughts from Pastor Dave

Epiphany Sunday – January 10, 2021

Thoughts for Epiphany Sunday come from two biblical passages.

- Luke 20:20 – *“The shepherds returned to the fields, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, which was just as they had been told.”*
- Matthew 2:12 – *“And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”*

The twelve days of Christmas ended January 6, and the season of Epiphany, which refers to “a manifestation of light” – i.e. the star that the wise men followed – begins. It will continue until February 17, Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the season of Lent.

The last Christmas gospel is the story of the three wise men. Usually it is during this time that the church Christmas decorations are taken down, put in boxes and stored in the attic for next year, along with electrical lights, candles and evergreen boughs. We do the same at home except for various ways of trying to get rid of the leftover cookies. The birds love them. Indeed, Christmas celebrating is over; boxed up and put away.

It’s back to our old routine, usually school and work. Life returns to a sort of normal, with the exception of this year as we continue with the challenges of the COVID – 19 and rioting in the streets. I read somewhere that Christmas is when we see the human race more like God intended us to be; kinder, thoughtful, generous, and more considerate. Well, somewhere in our hearts, I hope. This thought is beautifully expressed by a favorite poet Edgar Guest:

***“Human beings are the finest toward the finish of the year;
We are almost like we should be when the Christmas season’s here.
Then we are thinking more of others than we did the month before,
And the laughter of the children is a joy worth waiting for.
We are less the selfish creatures than at any other time,
When the Christmas spirit rules us, we come close to the sublime.
We are ever in a struggle and we are often misunderstood,
There are days that the worst of us is the master of the good.
But at Christmastime, kindness rules us and we put ourselves aside,
Our petty hates are vanquished and our hearts are open wide.
O, I don’t know how to say it, but somehow it seems to be,
That at Christmas time...we are almost...what God meant us to be.”***

But where does it go? For some people, the spirit of Christmas peace and generosity is boxed up and put away for another year. There is a story about an old man who was sitting in his house one day in January and he thought he heard the voice of a little boy singing. The old man heard a knock at the door and he slowly got up and shuffled over to open the door. There was a little boy singing 🎵*“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”* and the boy sang the chorus with real gusto, *“Gloria!”* The old man was not amused and he spoke gruffly, *“Sonny, don’t you know that Christmas was over four weeks ago? Today is January 25 and Christmas has been over for a month?”* The little boy replied in his excited voice, *“Yes, but I had the measles at Christmastime and then I got the mumps, and I just got out of the house. I wasn’t able to do any Christmas caroling this year, so here I am.”* 🎵*“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”* The crotchety old man grumbled and slammed the door. Like many, he mistakenly understood Christmas was for only one day. He did not understand about Christmas.

What happened to the shepherds, the wise men, and the baby Jesus when Christmas was over?

The shepherds heard the angels sing on that starry night and they went to the manger to see the baby Jesus. They were filled with the Holy Spirit but they couldn't stay for there was much routine work to be done. The Bible tells us that they returned to their jobs glorifying God with an attitude of gratitude all year long. What does it mean for us to go back to our old routines, jobs, glorifying and praising God? It means to return more thankful to God for his goodness to us, for his generosity, gifts and grace. Every job we have is a holy job, even if it's doing the ordinary things of life. It is the heart of the person that makes the common and ordinary job holy and sacred. The old limerick goes: ***"It is not so much where you live, but how and why you live; and as you live, to the world your highest give."***

Perhaps two years after Jesus' birth, the wise men found him, not in a stable, but living in a house with his family. The wise men came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; generous gifts for the holy family. Where did the wise men go? Back to their homelands, but by another way.

And where did Jesus go? His Spirit of God's grace and peace are now in you, as you return to your fields, glorifying and praising God.

Where did Christmas go? Too often, Christmas goes into storage for another year. The shepherds went back to work in their fields, glorifying and praising God. And the wise men went back to their countries, families and friends. But Jesus has come to live in your heart and mind forever.

Remember this Sunday school song?

***♪Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus;
Come in today, come in to stay; come into my heart, Lord Jesus.***

***♪Out of my heart, out of my heart, shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus;
Shine out today, shine out always; shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus.***

A Wesley Covenant Prayer (What it mean to be a servant of Christ)

Let me be your servant, under your command. I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things.

Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal.