

Meditation for January 7, 2018 (EpiphanyB) “Shining In The Storm”

*(Based on Genesis 1:1-5 and Matthew 2:1-12)*

Our neighbor has some unusual outdoor lights. They went up around the end of October—a weird little slash & swoop of bright orange down the stair railing and along the edge of her back deck. Where there had been a house-shaped shadow under the pines at the top of the ridge, suddenly there was this jolly, bold 24-7 stripe of light. It was a bit disturbing—first, because we were used to that house being so quiet & dark at night, and second, because the lights just happen to shine right in our bedroom window.

Halloween came and went. The lights went off for a while, and I guessed she had taken them down. The season for orange lights is a mercifully short one. But a week before Christmas, they came on again, same slash down the staircase, same swoop over the deck railing. And this time, they were purple. Purple in the morning. Purple in the evening. Purple all through the night. After the snow fell, that purple got amplified. It bounced off the snowdrifts and made everything around that little house and everything under those pine trees shine. I saw our neighbor in the grocery store on Christmas Eve Eve—we were both trying to beat the rush—and I said, “those are some lights you've got over there.” She grinned, and her whole face lit up. “Aren't they? My brother gave them to me for my birthday in October. You can change the colors—there's a setting for every holiday and season of the year!”

When the Eastern Wise Men noticed a new light in the night skies, the science of their time told them something was about to change. The birth of great souls was often accompanied by such signs. And it didn't matter what they had come to expect, or how they understood politics and religion. They wanted to learn more, even if it required a dangerous journey of weeks. They wanted to bear witness. They wanted to offer gifts.

Of course, they also understood protocol. And so, as they travelled, they stopped at the local ruler's court—a chance to confer with other wise advisors who had been

hired to serve there, and a chance to exercise diplomacy, maybe even earn an official endorsement, a scroll promising safe passage. But you can't always count on rulers to do the right thing, or even the kind thing—when they met Herod, when they shared their news and observed the tightening of his jaw, the nervous twitches in his forehead, the narrowing of his eyes—they knew he no longer saw them as allies, but as carriers of a political threat. He told them to bring back details so he could worship too. And his voice was so empty of awe or joy, his behavior so strangely at odds with his words, the wise men became deeply concerned—not only for their own safety, but for the safety of everyone connected with the new life heralded by the star.

They left the court, and waited for nightfall, with a new sense of urgency. And in Bethlehem, where the star stopped & stayed, the scripture says they were “overwhelmed with joy.” The sight of that child, with hay in his hair and starlight on his face—and the look on his parents' faces, lined with worry yet utterly transformed by love—that sight moved them beyond all their courtly customs and learned ways. It dropped them to their knees. And each of them felt, that night, two things at once: a longing to keep this child—and every child—safe, and a longing to tell everyone, everywhere, to seek him out, to know of him, to be changed by the love of him, and let that love change the world.

It was the storm that taught me. Last week, as the landscape sank into deep cold and everything around me began to freeze, I looked out my window. And there was that strange new light, reflected against the freezing rain and drifting snow—a light that defied the cruel wind's power, a light that laughed in the face of winter's misery. And now I knew that the light was a gift, a gift that had brought joy to our neighbor, who has severe rheumatoid arthritis and lives in almost constant pain. This gift of light had lifted her eyes beyond the limitations of her suffering to see the wider landscape and discover delight in that re-awakened vision.

It is Epiphany-- the season of light, the season of discovery and revelation. And now I invite you to wonder, with me, what it means to seek the light, through harsh

weather and the human storms of fear and worry and pain. What does it mean to seek the light when each day brings new concerns for our future? What does it mean to seek the light when our national leaders keep trying to play Herod? What does it mean to seek the light when those in power lash out and threaten to destroy this world that God loves so much? They shout about endings, but that is not the way of our Christian faith. They work to silence other voices, to poison our land, air, and waters, to desecrate God's earthly gifts. But that flies in the face of this Epiphany story, this story of new life, new purpose, and re-creation. Because we are people of the road and the stable. We have been surprised by angels. We have been changed by love and overwhelmed by joy. We have travelled long and hard, because—in the midst of all our nightmares and all our darkness—a new light appeared.

Sometimes, light is uncomfortable. It may disturb your sleep. It may challenge your propriety. It may change your perception and your priorities. And—whether you think yourself foolish or wise—if you live fully into the challenge of our faith, it may move you, like those ancient travellers, to take your dreams seriously, and seek a new way home.

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