

2 Christmas, Year A 2020  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
January 5, 2019  
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Jeremiah 31: 7-14   Psalm 84   Ephesians 1:3-14   Matthew 2:13-18

Today is the first Sunday of the month, the first Sunday of 2020, which is the first Sunday of a new decade, and the 12th Day of Christmas! We do not have 12 drummers drumming, but in the Christmas song, this is their day. Tomorrow is the day for the three kings, and we will honor that day with a worship service at 6:30pm. You are invited and encouraged to attend this Epiphany service.

Today we broaden our celebration of Jesus' birth into events surrounding his birth. Any remaining sentimentality we may have about Christmastide is wrenched away from us as we hear about Herod trying to kill Jesus by killing all of the male children under the age of two in Bethlehem. We recognize that day on December 28; it is called The Slaughter of the Innocents.

Jesus was born into danger. Even the gifts that the wise men bring foreshadow his death.

Gold, representing the best things, is something one brings to a king. Jesus is called the King of the Jews, Messiah, in a country in which Herod is the King of the Jews, messiah. Pilate will ask Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Frankincense is a sticky resin, whitish sap from a tree, used in worship as incense. It was used in the worship of the many deities of the day and was the incense used in sacrificial worship in the Temple. Jesus is the full and perfect sacrifice to God.

Myrrh was used not only to anoint kings, but as part of the spice mixture put on a corpse to prepare the body for burial. The women were ready to prepare Jesus' body for burial. The king, a living sacrifice, died for us.

Matthew, was writing about Jesus by putting him in the context of history, with biblical stories that were familiar to those who heard the gospel. Matthew probably wrote for a mostly Jewish audience. In the history of his readers and in the line of Jesus' descendants, there is another person who guided and saved the people under the hand of God. This leader was saved from death as a baby; some wise women floated him down a river, giving him the gift of life. He was not a king, but talked to God; he saw God's finger write words on stone tablets. He brought the word of God to the people, and led them out of slavery in Egypt. Along the way, miracles of manna and water from a rock sustained God's children.

The person, of course, is Moses.

From that context, Jesus is "the new Moses." That statement is not meant to disparage Moses, but to establish that the new covenant is connected to the prior one, and in fact, comes within the context of the prior covenant. Matthew connects Moses to Jesus, from God-with-us in the wilderness and in clouds and fire to God-with-us Immanuel, vulnerable and waiting for us to hold him.

We have a choice about finding and following Jesus. It is our decision whether or not to follow the light of the star, to visit the holy family, to bring gifts to our Lord. Do we dare to hold Jesus in our arms and hearts?

Like the magi, we do bring gifts to Jesus. Our gifts do not foreshadow a dangerous future, but a present and a future filled with hope and even joy.

Sometimes the gift we bring to Jesus gift is our brokenness, our willingness to submit to who we are and where we are. We are called to be fully open to Jesus. This is us coming to Jesus in our everyday “stay at home” clothes, not our finest attire. This is us coming to Jesus in tears, in failure, in remorse. Our gift is that we show up, fully in need of God’s grace, through God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes our gift is our finest: the offerings of our time, talent, labor, and heart. We clothe ourselves with a spirit of hospitality, of light and hope. We do our best to welcome everyone, to serve those in need, to attend to what is needy in ourselves. We reach, reach, reach into the community, bringing Jesus along, presenting our finest in how we live and what we do.

We bring the gift of hope. We are still a broken and violent world. The tensions in Iran, Iraq, and other places in the world with the United States are ongoing and close. Every war or warlike attack is contrary to ultimate peace. Killing one enemy will reveal our next enemy, and the next one, and the next. The massive fires in Australia threaten and have killed thousands upon thousands of God’s creatures. We cry with the psalmist, “How long, Lord, how long?”

Being a Christian means living into the deep hope of God’s kingdom breaking into our world now. Faith means meeting God who has indeed broken the bonds of heaven and come to us. Faith is giving all of ourselves to a life that will continue to surprise us, to show us God in all things, to see Christ in other people. And though we fail yet again, God has not. God-with-us, Jesus, the name that is a verb meaning save, has come. God is still active, though our waiting is long. Come again, Lord Jesus, and make us whole. Come to us now in the breaking of the bread. Let us hold you, Jesus, that you might save your children. Come, Lord Jesus!