

**“Shine, Jesus, Shine”**  
**Isaiah 60:1-6      Matthew 2:1-12**

I hope that you are not finished with your Christmas celebrations. We were in Orlando to celebrate Christmas with our family. Driving through the neighborhood up there the day after Christmas I noticed several Christmas trees all ready de-ornamented and placed by the side of the road to be picked up. I felt a little saddened by that, what’s the hurry I wondered?

But not in our worship. Christmas is worth savoring and taking our time with so I want to begin this morning by reading from a gift I received, a book of poems by one of our members, Louise Rickert. It is titled “A Magical Day”

What can I write about Christmas?

Christ was born on Christmas Day,  
 Loved us all more dearly,  
 Took all our sins away.  
 Whether they were little sins.  
 Or big ones from the start,  
 Christmas means forgiveness,  
 He gives with all his heart.

Christmas means sweet music,  
 Sounding like Angel Choirs,  
 Maybe we just imagine it,  
 Because of our hearts desires. (to interject here, we certainly did not just imagine beautiful music here at FUMCP – our entire Music Ministry really blessed us with their angelic offerings during the Advent and Christmas Season.)  
 Christmas means loving gifts,  
 Like the wisemen gave to him,  
 Filling the world with happiness,  
 Right up to the brim. (Again, I interject. I know that I speak for all the staff when I thank each of you that contributed to the love gift that was presented to each of us. Each expression was a real blessing to us and we thank you with all our heart.)

The shining star that lit up the night,  
 To guide the wise men on their way,  
 They knew that they would find him,  
 ‘Mid the animals in the Hay.

Loving families gathered ‘round,  
 Mother Mary and Joseph too,  
 Adoring Baby Jesus,  
 Smiling back at you.

Christmas, we all love it,  
 What a wonderful magic day,

From our rising in the morning,  
 'till the gifts are all put away.

All I would add to this poem is, let's not be in a rush to put away Christmas. Of course, I am talking about more than just the decorations that we have so much enjoyed. I am talking about the spirit of generosity and good will. I am talking about the spirit of Christ himself, that is only symbolized by the baby in the manger.

It is one dimension of the beauty of the sense of timing of the liturgical church year that Christmas is not just a one day celebration but is actually a twelve day feast that begins on December 25<sup>th</sup> and culminates on January 6 with the Feast of Epiphany. The good news of great favor that is proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds was thoughtfully pondered by Mary – she knew of the significance of this birth. In her joy Mary intuitively knew that “Now is the time of salvation, now is the time when the whole of God’s mercy is made available to all creation, now is the time, this is God’s time, this is God’s invitation.”

In today’s gospel it is the magi, the wise men from the east who carefully, not only observed the rising of a new star but also made the decision to follow that star by a daring act of faith. Jesus was born as a baby, but Jesus did not remain as a baby. In the same way the light of Christmas does not allow us to confine Jesus to the manger, but we are challenged to grow out of our childish ways of thinking about God.

A year ago our grandson River had just turned one year old; he had just begun to walk and he was still drinking from a bottle. One of the gifts we had for him last year was a large teddy bear and the picture I have from last Christmas is of River hugging the teddy bear and offering the bear a drink from his bottle. That was a year ago. What a difference a year makes.

This year when we got together in Orlando River’s big gift was an elevated track on which he could race his collection of match book race cars. There was no teddy bear and no bottle in sight. It was all about racing cars and reading books. What a difference a year makes.

The birth of the baby Jesus is only the beginning. The crowning feast of Christmas is Epiphany when we begin to perceive that not only has the Son of God become a human being but that the invitation is to all of us to become incorporated as living members into his body. The gospel for today can be expressed at its simplest as “Shine, Jesus, Shine.”

This is illustrated for us in Matthew by the magi, the wise men who were completely outside and apart from the tradition in which Jesus was born. I want us to take a closer look at them, not just for curiosity’s sake but with open hearts

and open minds seeking to let the radiance of God's love grow within us and transform us.

First of all, these men were wise enough to stand in the darkness and to take the time to be observant. In today's world it is much more difficult to be observant of the sky because there is so much illumination around that the stars may be there, but we just can't see them. The illumination and twinkling lights that surround us can just be masks of a deeper darkness of fear and anxieties that afflict us.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of more darkness than just a night sky without the pervading glow that surrounds us. "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples." Have you ever wondered, what is the difference between darkness and thick darkness? If you take a minute and think about it you may have known "thick darkness" in your life. If you have, you also know how it takes a kind of gutsy, courageous wisdom to stand in thick darkness, and you know, I hope you know, how precious it is when we are standing in thick darkness to catch a glimpse of radiant light. That is a hope that is God's gift to the world in Jesus Christ.

They were wise enough to have the courage to stand in the darkness. Then they were wise enough to allow themselves to be led, to be followers. They followed a star. Stars are not secret; they are public events, but only these wise ones had the initiative to follow the star. They had a vision of the child, and they had a willingness to be led, and in order to maintain that willingness they had to remain open to what they knew and also to what they did not know.

My brother works at one of the resorts at Disney World so he had to work on Christmas Day. He works in retail and periodically he trains new employees. Most of the time they are college students from all over the world, from China, from France, from Brazil, from all over. On Christmas Day he was training one of the new employees. He was telling me that one of the real challenges of training these young people is that they are far too polite. He explains and demonstrates various procedures and when he asks them if they understand they smile and nod their heads and say, "Yes, Yes, Thank you very much." And then the next day it becomes obvious that they really haven't understood what he said at all. They don't really understand until they have actually practiced the procedures he is explaining.

I was thinking that is very similar to our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. The magi were wise enough to not settle for smiling and nodding their heads and saying, "Thank you very much." They were candid enough to acknowledge that they did not know where to find the Christ child; they had a vision of who they were seeking but they had enough candid honesty to acknowledge that they didn't know all they needed to know. We will grow as disciples when we become

candid enough to acknowledge that we do not know all we need to know and then actively seek to be led. Shine, Jesus Shine.

The magi were wise enough to stand in the darkness. They were wise enough to acknowledge that they did not know it all and that they needed to be led. And when they found the child they were wise enough to open their treasure chests and in so doing they were wise enough to allow themselves to become changed by the child.

When they open their treasure chests these Magi teach us to value the Christ. The wise men become models for our desire and for our adoration. With each gift they present we shown a way to shift the weight of our heart in an unaccustomed direction. When the Magi offer gold, which is a gift for a king, we are invited to lessen the tribute we offer to the power structures to which we belong and on which we depend; when they offer him frankincense, which indicates a priest, we are invited to grow beyond comforting delusions and to be drawn into the jagged-edge sacrifice that this Priest will live out in his life; and when they offer him myrrh, which indicates the death of a prophet, the Magi invite our hearts be lightened as we are freed from the fears and addictions that drive our desires. Shine, Jesus, Shine!

We have been singing, "O Come let us adore him" but it is also true that as an infant grows the baby is also learning to look, and it is the same with the Christ child. The magi were wise enough to know that they would be seen, really seen by this child. And we are in his sight as well. Shine, Jesus, Shine. He looks at us with the eyes of a king and claims authority over our lives. Shine, Jesus, Shine. He looks at us with the eyes of a priest and his presence brings healing and salvation. Shine, Jesus, Shine. He looks at us with the eyes of a prophet and challenges us to invest ourselves and risk ourselves in the least among us, not because we are so good, but because he is already there.

Shine, Jesus, Shine. Long after the Christmas trees are all taken down and put away for another year we will become radiant with wisdom as we allow ourselves to be led in Christ's way of peace. Shine, Jesus, Shine. Let the Feast of Christ continue.

Rev Stephen Hoffman  
First United Methodist Church of Palmetto  
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