

Jan 8, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Star Sight

Matthew 2:1-12

“In the time of King Herod, well after Jesus was born...wise astrologers from the East came to Jerusalem, asking ‘Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews? We have observed his star at its rising and come to pay him homage.’ When Herod heard this he was frightened, as were all his subjects. So calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people he inquired where the Messiah was to be born. Experts told him, ‘According to prophecies, in Bethlehem, of Judea. For so it was written, ‘And you Bethlehem, are by no means least...for from you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd Israel, my people’“

Then Herod secretly called the wise men to learn precisely when they had started seeing the star. He then said, ‘Go to Bethlehem and search diligently for this child. And when you have found him, bring me back word so that I too may go and pay him homage.’ So they set out and followed the star as it went ahead of them till it stopped over the place where the child was...”

My grandpa Hopkins, (God rest his soul)
loved to quote old sayings, and one of his favorites was,
“I see,’ said the blind man. Though he couldn’t see at all.”

What he was getting at is this:
there are many kinds of sight that are crucial for life.
Obviously eye-sight,
but also insight, hindsight & foresight.
Well, friends today’s Epiphany bible story
commends to us another kind of sight - STAR SIGHT.

What is star sight?

Well, the famous astronomer, Neil deGrasse Tyson
in his new book, *Starry Messenger* gives a good example.
He takes us back to Galileo.
Galileo had just perfected the telescope, and certified
that our solar system revolved around the sun.

These findings turned common knowledge upside down.
Before then it was believed that the Earth and Humans
were the center of the universe, not the sun.
But thanks to Galileo the world’s understanding
of itself would never be the same.
What they thought was true
was replaced with a whole new truth,
THANKS TO STAR-SIGHT - when a
heavenly perspective changed an earthly truth .

Another example of star-sight.

Frank Borman, Jim Lovell & Bill Anders,
were the astronauts of Apollo 8.

On Dec. 24th, 1968 they were the first human beings
to ever witness an “earth-rise”.

Scrambling for his camera, Bill Anders took a photo
that became world famous and inspired many
to suddenly have a more global attitude
toward life on earth.

Other astronauts were gifted with star-sight.

On his way home from visiting the moon,
Edgar Mitchell had a mystical life-changing experience.
Viewing Earth amongst all the other heavenly bodies
he was overwhelmed with the interconnectedness
of everything.

“We humans are all part of the star-dust” he realized.

Astronaut Rusty Schweickart had his star-sight “ah-ha”
moment in March of 1969.

He took the picture that became the famous
“little blue marble” photo.

Seeing our planet with no walls and no boundaries
he saw the sin of our nationalism,
and henceforth worked diligently for world peace.

Then, just recently, former astronaut Scott Kelly,

and was recently elected senator from Arizona,
shared his spiritual transformation.

He was coming home from his historic stint
on the Intern. Space Station
and was overcome with the dire need
for protecting the environmental of Planet Earth,
because it was the only home we all had.

World peace, planetary environmental protection,
the interconnectedness of all life -
these are just smatherings of star-sight.

Says deGrasse Tyson,

**“Human eyes alone are insufficient for revealing
fundamental truths about the nature of life.”**

Star-sight lifts us up above ourselves,
almost as if we have a god’s-eye view of life.

Star-sight allows us transcendence.

It forces the human imagination to seek
what is universally true for all people.

Star-sight bestows a view of what we all have
in common and how all encompassing
the heavenly view of life should be.

And in these challenging times in which we live,
with so many petty power struggles,
so much tribal divisiveness,
and so many “alternative facts” and “fake truths”,

how dearly we need the gift of star-sight.

But you don't have to be an astronaut
to obtain star-sight.

We can be blessed with it right here from life on earth.

It's a shame the Catholic church gave Galileo
such a hard time and henceforth created this suspicion
between religion and science.

When they put Galileo on trial,
they used the scriptures against him.

They referenced the Genesis story of the 7-days of
Creation, and left the impression
which is still prevalent among many Christians
all the bible is against star-sight.

But the fact is,
there's plenty in scripture and ancient faith
that celebrates Star-sight.

Take ancient cosmology of those who wrote the bible.

They believed in "The 3-tiered Universe" -

a universe divided into 3 levels:

earth, firmament & heaven.

- a) Earth held all the land and waters of the earth.
- b) Firmament (sky) held all the rain, clouds & sun.

c) Heaven was above it all and thought to be the Realm of God and source of divinity.

Now, thanks to modern telescopes and space travel, we know that the physical universe is very different than that.

But the 3-tiered universe was a spiritual reality for the writers of the bible.

And they believed the underside of heaven was mirror-like. It was shiney.

It was meant to reflect divine values and goodness back down upon life on earth.

We presume Jesus believed this because he enshrined those words that we pray every Sunday in “The Lord’s Prayer”, *“on earth as it is in heaven”*.

Indeed, it is easy to see Jesus’ entire mission on earth as one of teaching his disciples how to have star-sight!

We also see how star-sight inspired certain psalms like Psalm #8

*“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth
When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers;
the moon and the stars that you have established.
What is humankind that you are mindful of us?
Mere mortals that you care for us?”*

But the greatest celebration of star-sight in the bible
is the Epiphany story itself;

(And the magi said)

*“We have observed his star at its rising
and come to pay him homage...”*

Their whole journey symbolizes how star-sight works.

They didn't blindly follow the star,
they followed it OBEDIENTLY.

They were living out an ancient version
of the modern “scientific method”.

That approach to truth

where human opinion bows down

and pays homage to the journey toward Fact.

As modern science follows the facts

no matter where they lead,

so the Magi followed the star.

King Herod, on the other hand,

symbolizes everything star-sight ISN'T!

Herod lived by a wisdom based on popular opinion.

What is called, “Group Think”.

*When Herod heard (about this new king) he was frightened,
as were all his subjects.*

*So calling all the chief priests & scribes of the people
he inquired where the Messiah was to be born.*

And whereas the Magi were foreigners,
and sought a universal truth,
King Herod showed a devotion to tribalism
and regionalism.

*(When Herod asked them) Experts told him,
'According to prophecies, in Bethlehem, of Judea.
For so it was written, 'And you Bethlehem,
are by no means least... for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people' "*

And King Herod believed he was dealing with a truth
which he could manipulate for his own personal power.

*Then Herod secretly called the wise men
to learn precisely when they had started seeing the star.
He then said, 'Go to Bethlehem
and search diligently for this child.
And when you have found him, bring me back word
so that I too may go and pay him homage.*

Yes indeed, every way that King Herod viewed his world,
every truth that guided his life
every spirit that formed his character
was condemned and overshadowed by star-sight.
And don't we dearly need this very kind of star-sight?
For there is far too much tribalism, egotism and
petty politics governing our world right now.

In closing,
the other day during a pastoral visit,
I noticed a cute little quip framed on a restroom wall.
It was about the The 3 Wise Men.
It said, **“If the 3 Wise Men were women:**
- **they would have asked directions sooner.**
- **they would have gotten there on time.**
- **they would have given more practical gifts**
 that Jesus, Mary and Joseph really needed.
- **and there would have been world peace.”**

I smiled as I read it because that says it all.
Yes we need hindsight, yes, we need foresight,
yes, we need insight.
Star-sight transcends them all.
Star-sight grounds us in the factual,
it inspires us to the universal,
it lifts us to the heavenly.

So often we hear the well-worn saying,
“Reach for the Stars”.
Well, as Christians I believe we are called
to reach of star-SIGHT!

PRAYER OF PASTORAL CARE Epiphany Jan 8, 2023

The prophet Isaiah calls to the people of Israel: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying, Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious and Holy God, your eternal purposes, revealed to us in Christ Jesus, show that your love extends to the ends of the earth, and stretches far beyond our imaginings. We thank you for such expansive love and for the rich variety of ways you make yourself known among us. We pray for your church, sometimes afraid of the diversity you have designed, too often timid in its proclamation of the gospel before the rulers and powers of this world. Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit that we may be bold and confident through faith in Christ.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heal divisions within the whole church so that we may live truly as members of the same body. Cast out jealousies and suspicions until we become more truly sharers in the gospel promise. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all people in positions of power in our country and throughout the world. We lift up the peoples of Ukraine and of Russia that hatreds may soften, and ways may be found for the seeds of peace to grow. Give to all who control economic and military might, wisdom to choose the common good over personal or political gain. On this 2-year anniversary of the insurrection of Jan.6, we thank you for the public honoring of police officers, election workers, and officials who worked so hard and faithfully in the defense of democracy. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for people who have little power according to the world's measure of power. Defend the cause of the poor; deliver those in need; put an end to oppression; and save the lives of everyone in harm's way this day. May all victims of violence find their lives redeemed by your love and care. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift before you those on this church's immediate needs list. ...

Stretch us, O God; expand the horizons of our lives so that we are able to comprehend the mysterious and wonderful ways you are at work in the world.

In Christ, through Christ, by the power of your Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

OFFERING

God is our deliverer, helping those who call to God for justice. As people of God We participate in God's care of creation and for all who are in need. Let us bring to God our offerings with glad and generous hearts.

*DOXOLOGY

*PRAYER On this day as we celebrate Epiphany, we humbly ask you, O God, to use these offerings and use us for your plans and purposes. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen.