

Sermon: The Journey to God**Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: January 1, 2017**

So here we are at the gate of a new year, looking out into the unknown of 2017. There's a journey ahead of each of us in the coming year; for some an outer journey to a new land or a new configuration of family, a new job or the making of a new home, while for others it's more of an internal journey awaiting us, a journey of the heart and the soul that will take the shape and contours of the various events of the coming year. But in either case there is a journey ahead.

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew is appropriate to get us started on this journey. After all the joy and excitement, the busy-ness and crowdedness of Christmas and the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, the scene shifts and we are reminded very quickly of the implications of this birth. The divine light shines, God is revealed in our lives, we awaken, and there are consequences. For God's coming into our lives does not leave us unchanged. As Annie Lamott so aptly puts it – "I do not understand the mystery of grace, only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us."

This is what the Wise Men found to be the case. Somehow way out in the far reaches of the Persian Empire, through their obscure instruments, profound ponderings, and high-minded philosophies, they came upon hints of a great mystery, some whispers of an eternal truth that they could not fully grasp. It was *just* enough of a sense of it to get them moving, because they could not fully understand, standing still.

They could not grasp the truth of this mystery with their minds racing and their feet on sure ground. They had to move their bodies, out from what they knew, out from the comfortable, familiar and static, to... where *exactly* - they did not know - until eventually they arrived at this obscure corner of a little land called Israel. It was there that the truth dawned on them fully – an epiphany - not as an idea or as a concept, but as an invitation to a relationship with another. But this relationship was unlike any they had ever known, one that touched their lives with subtle tones, quiet whispers, inconspicuous beginnings, but that would change everything for them and for most everyone around them. The Wise Men took that journey and found what they were looking for and discovered that what they had been looking for, had in fact found them.

This was no spectacle, no moment to catch with Snap Chat, a selfie or a tweet but somehow this baby was a revelation of their deepest selves, a still point at the center of the universe, the first born of creation itself somehow, laid open, vulnerable, here before them at their journey's end... or its beginning. And what was required of them was their homage, their awe, their astonishment as they fell on bended knee. These *wise* men knew that everything changed from here, that they stood at the fulcrum point of history itself, and so they brought their treasure – Gold for a king, frankincense for a high priest – the prophet Isaiah, remember, spoke of the glorious restoration of Jerusalem saying that rulers and kings would come from afar bringing gold and frankincense - and the wise men brought myrrh, which was used for anointing the dead, prefiguring what would be coming for this Infant

King whose priestly self-sacrifice would be offered as the new covenant between humanity and God.

The Wise Men themselves did not know where they were going, nor did they understand the true symbolism of the treasures they brought, that they foretold of the future. But they made the journey and brought their gifts nonetheless trusting that their understanding of it all was really not necessary but something larger was happening here that this was undoubtedly something of God's doing which required their movement and response and openness.

Can we like the Wise Men do our part, move out into the unknown of the year, offer our treasure for what is good and right, and trust that God has got this, that a larger plan is unfolding beyond our understanding and that we must only do the next best thing we know how to do. Let us confess that our vision of it all is imperfect, limited, short-sighted, and that God's provisions are sure, God's heart big enough to hold it all....

I'll end with Louise Haskin's poem "God Knows":

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

So heart be still: What need our little life
Our human life to know, If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife, Of things both high and low,
God hideth His intention.

God knows. His will is best. The stretch of years
Which wind ahead, so dim, To our imperfect vision,
Are clear to God. Our fears, Are premature; In Him,
All time hath full provision.

I'd like to invite you into a prayer time for this turning of the new year, remembering that in this in between time of Christ's coming and the final fulfillment that we try and live our lives attuned and aligned to God's heart and God's purposes. So you'll see in the insert a three-part prayer prompt and I encourage you to spend a few minutes to write out your responses and pray this prayer with me. These 3 parts are the heart of prayer – praise and thanksgiving, confession, and petition...

A Prayer for the New Year

“O God, you crown the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with abundance!” (Psalm 65:11) Hear our New Year prayer:

We praise and thank You for your faithfulness and presence in the year that has gone by. We particularly offer gratitude for....

You are all good and merciful, O God, and we too often fail to live like we know you would have us live. In considering the year that has gone by we ask forgiveness for these particular ways that we have missed the mark and fallen short...

As we step into this New Year on this new day in the congregation of your people and as we consider the year to come, we offer these petitions for ourselves and others....