

Happy New Year! If you are seeing this or hearing this then you made it through 2020 and that in itself is an achievement. Three days into the New Year and nine days into the twelve days of Christmas we are in the beginning days of our entrance into rekindled hope as Americans and into reaffirmed hope in our faith in Jesus Christ.

So while we hope and pray for Covid to end and sanity to reign we mustn't forget it's almost Epiphany, the day that God was made manifest in Christ and revealed to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi. Since Epiphany comes on January sixth and today is only the third January, those wise men are still slogging along, walking along side or riding their camels as they keep a steady gaze looking for THE place below the giant star. Perhaps the star they followed that time—the star that led them to the cave where the Christ child lay—was and is in fact the very Great Conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn that we watched or heard about last week—something that most likely **did** happen then as it did now, creating a brilliant light in the sky that people in the Middle East would have seen, that people all over the world saw then and now, which we in the soggy Northwest most likely missed due to clouds, rain or fog. But the Great Conjunction DID happen and the Christ child WAS born and the past year IS in the past. A new year and a new time is here.

“Love was born at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine; love was born at Christmas: star and angels gave the sign.” This hymn pulls together the miracle of the day when our faith was born—the star and the angels and **most of all** the love that Jesus brought into the world. Love was born, not hate. Compassion was born, not disregard for the other. Love was born to shine, once more, in the hearts and minds and actions of the people of his time and in the hearts and minds and actions of so many,

many more of us over the millenniums. Their time was not unlike our time. There was political intrigue—look at what Jesus' birth brought to the young children of the land and to his parents who had to flee for sanctuary in Egypt—look at what his later message of love brought to him out of others' fears for their own political and greedy futures. There was unrest. The Jewish people were looking for a king—a messiah—and the Romans governing Palestine were looking for any signs of protests or challenges to their power as occupiers of the land. We, in our own time—right now, in our own country—our own city—have ongoing protests and riots, an unsettled and dangerous part of our population confronting others with threats bringing counter threats that fill the air and the streets and our news. We, too, are looking for the peace and the hope that Christ brought—that Christ **brings**. We celebrate Christmas—when Christ was born—and we celebrate Epiphany—when the Magi arrived bringing gifts to the newborn child returning with the message that the God of love had been born. And what do we do with these momentous moments in our Christian heritage? Do we, like the Magi go, forth with the message of love? Do we know, within, the Christ of all forgiveness and all gentleness and all pervasive love? Do we go out into the world sharing that joy within us or do we let the world dampen our spirit, do we let Covid and the unrest and fears of what may yet come frighten us into a place where we choose to retreat rather than spread the Christ within with others through **our** words, our actions, our feelings for others? It's Covid time, so we are restricted through common sense and the the CDC. But it's a good time to share positive ideas and positive messages through phone calls and emails and face time and Zoom time. And if we are able to go out of our

homes, then a smile to one and all—-living scripture, not quoting scripture —-**can** bring Christ alive in our sphere of being.

Today's gospel reading is a story of maturation, self awareness and understanding that confronted his parents—-his family—-and the world with his divine nature—-his divine nature of love. We, also, are called to confront the world with our own baptized/believer selves, with the love of Christ, the wisdom of Christ and the promise of Christ. Our own Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, has just published a new book, **Love is the Way, Holding onto Hope in Troubling Times**. The purpose of this book, Bishop Michael said, is to explain what the way of love looks like, even as we walk it in a world that feels at times closer to a nightmare than to the dream. The way of love is how we stay decent during indecent times. It's for all of us who are sitting, looking around at the world at our leaders, saying, "Something has gone very wrong." It's for those who are fighting hard for a better world, and feeling lonely and defeated, and very, very tired."

And as we know, Bishop Curry reminds us that we are in a time of planetary crisis. The future of the earth we all live on is at stake. To do everything we can to save the air we breathe, the water we drink, the land on which we live, and the very earth that is our common home is no longer an academic consideration. It's now life-and-death. We can no longer afford the demonic luxury of bigotry or the false hope of hatred. We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, all of us children of God. As Dr. King often said in this regard, we have two choices before us, chaos or community. While we must be discerning, love is the ultimate criteria for that. Our job isn't to tell anybody how they should work out their relationship with the living God. Our job is to love, and in the case of

Christians, to witness to the way of love that came to us from Jesus's teachings."

So in the words of scripture and in the words of our Presiding Bishop let us look around the world God made out of God's love for us—the diversity of all of that is on our planet and let us rejoice that we are here to, in whatever way is possible, build upon that love so that our reflections of that love can make—even if it is only for our own little part of the universe —everything and everybody a bit better, a bit more loved and lovely, a bit more reflective of Christ embodied in us all. Be content, at peace with yourself and the world and one another. That's how one gets through the difficult times, with joy and love, not hatred and anger. May you choose love who has **already** chosen you. AMEN