

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
January 6, 2008
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Readings – Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon Title: “Uh-oh, We Lost the Child”

(open with prayer)

Introduction:

The great philosopher, Elvis Presley once sang, “Wise men say, only fools rush in.” Was he talking about the wise men from the book of Matthew? Was Elvis singing about being careful or giving one’s self over to truly loving another. Think about it for a second, it’s not normal for us to give up everything in order to fall in love. Remember, love makes our brains squishy and we tend to forget a lot when our passions are running high. Some people claim that age makes you forget, but I think the people who really love full bore are the ones that have lapses of memory. Real love can make us a little dizzy and even curb our appetites. I want us to experience this kind of love over and over again. Love in that unique way we have for the one we have chosen to spend our lives with, but also love for our friends and the friends of our friends. I wonder what would happen if we followed the star and finally found something and someone to love.

Our Epiphany story is about being surprised by this kind of love. It is about being fools and rushing in and not knowing what to expect. First, I have to do a little analysis of this story. There is no mention of three wise men in the story and most commentators remind the readers that for a group to travel from the East, probably Persia or even farther, they would travel in a large band for safety purposes. There were likely 30-40 travelers in this group. They were not kings, but it was dangerous to leave the palaces of the day, but were more likely astronomers, folks who followed stars and interpreted dreams based on their position in the sky. A curious light appeared in the sky and they probably spent a year or more trying to convince their rulers to fund this excursion, knowing that they may not ever return as well. This was a risk for everyone involved. This Epiphany story also takes place when the child is somewhere under two years old. They arrive at the house, see the child, offer him gifts and are warned in a dream to leave by another road.

When this band of stargazers appears, there is no manger, there are no shepherds, and there are no angels. The stars have led them to witness this child and they are described as being overwhelmed with joy. This is in stark contrast to the feeling that probably experienced back at Herod’s

place where in fear he commands these travelers to tell him the location of the child. Their hearts, in this encounter, are full of dread and fear at what Herod could do. So, they leave by another road and pretend for just a moment that this experience was exclusively for them. I'm here to say this morning that the Wise Men represent the problem with Christianity and religion in general.

You see, we never hear from the wise men again. They are moved, filled with joy, offer gifts, and leave. I think they represent the normal reaction to those encountering Jesus. Throughout his ministry people hear his message, receive his healing touch are filled with joy, offer thanks, and are never heard from again. The movement that Jesus is trying to build is an evangelical movement, a story telling movement. Wouldn't it have been an amazing story for these gentile stargazers to go back to Herod and describe the feeling of meeting this child. What if they confronted their fear and began to tell folks exactly who this child was and how they felt in his presence. It is not about the gifts, but about building the movement. Besides, what is a baby going to do with gold, frankincense and myrrh?

So many people that hear the message are moved, they even give in the offering, but they leave by some other road. We don't compel them to stay and have lunch. Sometimes, we don't even ask their name. Matthew's story is powerful because these outsiders are involved in the story and it sets up a huge conflict with Herod and the evil and fear lurking in the shadows, but it is also a reminder that being nice and lying sometimes go hand in hand. One of the prophets in the United Church of Christ, former UCC President Rev. Paul Sherry, is fond of saying, "Three generations of tact equal a liar." The astronomers offer a nice story, but where is their prophetic voice? Where is their story? Where is their invitation to come into Christ's presence and be moved?

Epiphany is one of those days where we have to talk about where the child is in our lives. What has the experience of meeting Jesus done for each of us? Where is our prophetic voice? Where is our story? How is our invitation to others shaping up in welcoming them into Christ's presence? How do we describe our Epiphany?

Is it the radiant light that warms your heart like Isaiah described? Is it an overwhelming sense of joy like we see in the wise men? Is it a time you were healed or welcomed home? What was your Epiphany like?

I have noticed that it's been a few weeks since someone volunteered to be a witness and tell a piece of their story. Remember this is a time to practice sharing Epiphany in the company of people who love you. These are the folks that share your home. Look around, we have seen the child together, and it is up to our collective conscious to keep that memory alive and vivid so that we can tell that story. All we have to do get that little giggle going and describe what it feels like to fall in love and

to be loved. We have to tell our stories so people will know that this is a place where folks meet Jesus and learn how to love. Your stories make a difference. You are the wise women and wise men who have loved and receive love. It is your Epiphany that will bring us closer to the truth and also closer to God. AMEN.