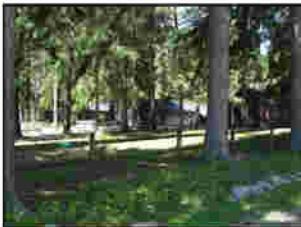


Calvary United Methodist Church
January 9, 2011

ROAD TRIP
Rev. Dr. S. Ronald Parks

Children's Sermon

Matthew 2:1-11



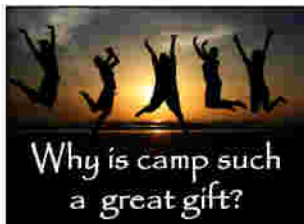
God's gifts are freely and joyously given for us to open each day. We welcome the children to the front of this worship space to celebrate the ongoing gift called Christmas.

Good morning! So here's the big question: What do you want for Christmas? You haven't even thought about it have you? You haven't even given Christmas a thought. Do you know why? It's a long, long time away.

Let me tell you about a gift that somebody here in the sanctuary might actually give you today. Are you looking for a gift today? Are you looking for a gift today? It would be okay to get a gift today wouldn't it? It's the gift called camping. We have in our conference a number of cool places where people go to do all sorts of things. They can go to hiking, they can go to do white water rafting, they can go to do crafts, they can go to do music. There are all sorts of reasons around here why people end up going to camp.

Have any of you ever been to camp? Three of you. Did you have a good time and would you go back again? If someone said, "I'm going to give you the gift of camp," would that be a good thing? Excellent, that's exactly right.

In everybody's bulletin this morning is a little envelope that has on it--*Be a hero, living like Jesus* which is our conference's camping theme for this year. There is a piece of information on this envelope that I think is really important for you to know. Did you know that in 2010 Calvary gave gifts (not the kind that you open) but gave twenty kids the opportunity to help them to go to camp. In other words, Calvary has this thing called a Campership Program where we give gifts to people to enable them to get to camp, especially



families that have more than one kid. Camp is not cheap anymore. Of the \$4162.50 that was needed by kids here to go to camp, \$3847.90 was given as a gift by you people which is what this envelope is for. It seems like a long time away when you will be swimming in a river or hiking in the woods without wearing boots and gloves and stuff. But it goes by pretty quickly, doesn't it?

Why is camp such a great gift? It's simple.

You get to meet all kinds of new friends.

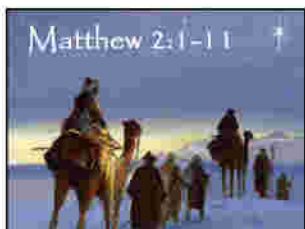
You get to have fun. Did you get to learn stuff?

More importantly, camp is a place where people go to get closer to God. In fact, for both Pastor Jeff and I our experiences at camp were part of the reason that we decided to go into the ministry. Now I know for some of you that may be statement against going to camp but for us camp was really important. It was a place to go on a journey to kind of figure out what God's gifts mean for us and it was a fun thing to do. We did it many times when we were kids. We have even led camps together as adults. It's always journey. It's always welcoming a bunch of kids and taking them through a week's time and growing together and figuring out what new stuff God wants to show us.

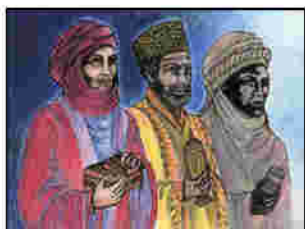


That's exactly the story of the three people who we think about most particularly on this Sunday which is the First Sunday of Epiphany. Usually on the First Sunday of Epiphany what we do is we place figures on the manger scene that is up there. In fact if you notice a lot of things have changed over the past two weeks. Can you think of something that's no longer there? Take a good look—what's not there anymore? The shepherds are gone. They went back to the hills to care for their sheep.

There are new people who are about to make their appearance. I thought that rather than just have you look at figurines placed on the alter it might be cool to invite the Wise Men and Mary here this morning. So that's what we did. We are going to welcome them in just a minute. But let's read their story first. This comes from the Good News according to Matthew.



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where can we find the newborn King? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on a pilgrimage to worship him." Everyone, including Herod, freaked out! Nevertheless, they shared the teaching of Micah—Bethlehem was the birthplace of the new ruler. The Wise Men were instructed to find the child and report back. To their surprise, the star let them the rest of the way to the manger. There, they presented gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That night, in a dream, an angel told them not to go back to Herod. So they went home a different way.



That's the story of the Wise Men but we have to kind of get the image up here on the alter so to do that we are going to listen to a song and watch the Wise Men on their journey.

(The Quartet sings *Have You Seen a Child?* While they are singing people portray the three Wise Men and Mary placing the baby in the manger.)

Now wasn't that cooler than just sticking a bunch of figures up on the altar? Yeah, because these are people who traveled. These are



people who didn't just see the star but they understood in the gift of the star which led them to the gift of Christ, God's love was being made known to all of us. And there is no gift greater anywhere—nothing you can put in a box, nothing you can buy in a store—nothing that has the value of sharing God's love. That's what it means to share God's love in all sort of gifts that we give: whether it be the gift of going to camp, the gift of sharing forgiveness, and all the things that we do in the name of Christ are ways to share God's love.

Thanks for sharing in our time this morning. Thank you to our Wise Men and to Mary, and also to our Quartet.



Message

Mark 8:27-29

Imagine Christmas is over. All the programs have been performed. All the pictures have been taken. The carolers are done singing. The holiday parties have come and gone. The presents are unwrapped and the big dinner have all been eaten. The Christmas music is turned off and families are headed back home. Someone from work is on the phone. The kids have a breakfast to get to. The house needs to be cleaned. The bills still need to be paid. The groceries are running low. The stock market is still down and up and down. The TV is still on. The news is still worrisome. Life just keeps going as if Christmas never happened.

But it did happen. Look around. The church is full of families and friends and laughter because the Baby is still the Savior. And the Savior is still the gift held up to a world still looking for joy and earth still waiting for peace. And the people still sing in wonder of the God who gave his Son and a Son who gave his life to add us to his family and one day welcome us home.

Imagine, Christmas is over but remember it really happened and it changed everything.

If you are like me you are in that Christmas is over funk. My tree is still up but we already have it on the calendar for next Satur-

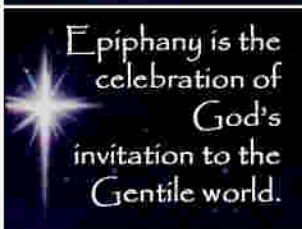
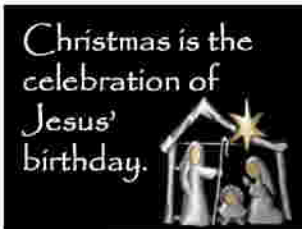
day, right after we get done taking this tree down. Boy, it's sad, isn't it? It's just depressing.

And, yes, things go on as though it never really happened. Or if it did happen, it doesn't really matter. People of the star, you and I—star children—we have an immense obligation in this world and in our own lives to remember that even though Christmas is over the good news goes on and that's what Epiphany is about.

Christmas really is over because Christmas is history. It's a specific event in a specific day.

It's the celebration of Jesus' birthday and just like your birthday it has a defined date, December 25th. It really happened and because it really happened it is something that is locked in time. It has a particular place in time. It happened X number of years ago in a specific place.

Epiphany, however, is something more and different than Christmas. Epiphany is both history in the sense that it is the celebration of God's manifestation and invitation to all the world, the Gentile world in particular, and that is actually celebrated by the Christian tradition on January 6th. It really happened. The Wise Men came from the east. They found Christ at the manger. They celebrated and then they went home.



Epiphany is more

than what happened
in the past.

Epiphany is

a present reality.

A continuing
realization
of the true
nature & meaning
of something.

God
says,
"Hey!
I'm here!"

I say,
"I know.
I can see
you."

But Epiphany is more than something that just happened in the past. You could make the argument that because of that, it is really larger than Christmas. It is a present and ongoing reality. It is truly eternal because what Epiphany celebrates is the continuing realization on our parts that there is something true and meaningful in life beyond what we usually think of. It is the realization of the true nature, the true essence of who it is and what we are. Christmas was the moment when that realization began to dawn in the world and it is symbolized by that star which is a sun on some world and that star is the beginning of a new day.

Epiphany is the ongoing story of God says, "Hey, I'm right here." It is a revelation. It is an opening and a disclosure. More importantly for us it's our response to God saying "Hey, I'm right here." It's us saying back "I know I can see you with my own two eyes."

We weren't there for Christmas. We didn't hear that. We didn't know about that. We were only told about that. It has come to us as a story. We believe the history of it. We believe the facts of it.

But this Epiphany thing, this God showing himself and saying, "Hey, dude, I'm right here." And us saying, "Yeah, I know I can see it." That's powerful stuff. That will go on as long as I have life, as long as I have eyes to see, as long as I can perceive reality around me and sense the true essence and meaning of what is going on Epiphany continues. Epiphany is God saying "Here I am." And I say, "I know and it makes all the difference in the world to me."

There is a story that has nothing to do with Christmas which speaks of that reality and its one person getting put on the spot with that exact same situation where God says, "Hey, I'm here," and it's

the story of a confession by a man named Peter.

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; others claim you’re a prophet.” “Who do you say I am?” he asked. Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Messiah.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone.

What Peter said was, “I know. I see God. He is right here. He is in you.” That’s a beautiful thing and that’s what Epiphany is all about. Yes it’s about three smart, learned, perceptive individuals who understood that God was doing something unique and incredible and different and they put their lives on hold and they decided to go see what it was.

But Epiphany is God’s invitation not to just three people in history; it’s his invitation for us to celebrate what we’ve seen. All the times when God says to us, “Hey, I’m right here.” You don’t have to look very far, I’m right here to celebrate what we’ve seen as a community, as people of faith who have gotten together for years and years and years both in this place and in other places. People who have given their lives, their riches, given their time and their talents. Who make a proclamation to the world on behalf of a God who says, “I’m here.” It’s our way of responding, “Yeah, I know. I see it. I’m on it.”

But it’s also individually an invitation for us to celebrate what God is doing for us as people, as human beings, one on one. Peter responds, “You’re the Christ.” Nobody else said anything. That was Peter’s response. He got it. He saw it. And then he spent the remainder of his time with Jesus trying to figure out what to do about that and just how much of his life he wanted that confession to claim. You are the Christ, yeah but don’t put me in any tough situations and don’t risk my life, for God’s sake, because I have trouble handling that.





It's an invitation for us to not only see what God has done but to anticipate what God will show us; what we will see in the future, what will unfold in 2011 and in all the days and all the years granted to us. What God will show us of the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. On earth, as it is in heaven. I would love to see peace come in my lifetime. I would love to see people treated justly and fairly. I would love for everyone to feel as though their life had meaning had a sense of purpose and that their gifts were not disregarded and disavowed by other people. I would love to see the Church of Jesus Christ reach its arms out into the world to create the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. But the probability is, just actuarially speaking, that I'll see the Kingdom in heaven before I see it here. And that's okay because I anticipate what God will do to bring about his Kingdom on earth through me and through you and through the church and through the body of believers called the Christian Church. Also, I anticipate what God will show me at that time when I have finished the journey and I've seen all here that I'm going to see.

But I also receive God's invitation to participate in what God is revealing to us today. God's showing us stuff today. Do you see it? God's tapping you on the shoulder saying, "Hey, I'm right here." And you and I are here this morning because we've seen it. We showed up. We show up to see what God is doing. We show up to share the joy that we experience in what God has done and what we anticipate God will do. So we show up. We come. We put ourselves in God's hands. We put ourselves at God's disposal. That's what the Wesley Covenant Renewal was about last week. Fill me up, pour me out, put me to doing, move me out of the way if I'm a problem. But to be part of it you've got to show up. You've got to give yourself to it. You've got to hear the invitation and say I accept. Yes, I see it and I'm here to be a part of it. We have to enjoy the show that's going on before us today. What wonders will you see? What glorious things might be revealed before you?

What is God going to show the people in your life? He is going to show them you and he is going to show them him in you. He is going to show them Christ in you. Showing up here is a great first step. Enjoying our time together and revealing in this glorious, brisk, winter day with a chance of snow on Tuesday, is all good stuff. But

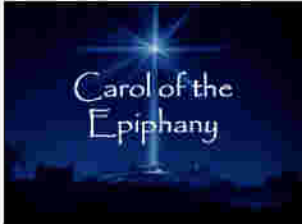


be the show. Take personal responsibility upon yourself to actually be the Epiphany, the manifestation and the invitation to all the world to come to the Manger of Bethlehem and worship the Newborn King.

When we see the reality of God, when we understand what it is that God has put before us in every moment, in every decision and in every person, then surely everything changes around us, but it begins with the Epiphany of God in me.

There is a beautiful song. It is found in the *Faith We Sing*. Don't turn to it. The words will be on the screen. Listen to the words which speak about where to find God in the smallest of places.

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I sought him dressed in finest clothes,
where money talks and status grows;
but power and wealth he never chose:
He lived in poverty.

I sought him in the safest place,
remote from crime or cheap disgrace;
but safety never knew his face:
He lived in jeopardy.

I sought him where the spotlights glare,
where, crowds collect and critics stare;
but no one knew his presence there:
born in obscurity.

I sought him in the learned hall
of iv'ry towers and ivy-ed walls.
But human wisdom always falls
before divinity.

Then, in the streets, we heard the word
that seemed, for all the world, absurd:
That those who could no gifts afford
encountered Christ the Lord.

And so, distinct from all we'd planned,
among the poorest of the land,
we saw what few might understand:
God in a baby's hand.

