

Jan 3, 2020

Christmas 2

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;

Isn't this often the way it is? People in power hear about something new coming --whether the "thing" is for good or whether it's for ill—and they react one of two ways: with words of hope, or words of fear. Herod reacts with fear.

We don't deal with "new" things very well. We like things to go along as they always have—the way things have always been done. We like our traditions. We crave normalcy. We like the known. The unknown--- well, let's just say it makes us a bit uncomfortable and leave it at that.

And then 2020 happened. Normal was gone. Traditions went out the window. Everything changed. (There's that word that Episcopalians just hate!!!)

The world ramped up, focusing mostly on the bad, feeding the fear, the panic, the distrust.

Now-- some will argue that this *just describes the world today*—it IS turbulent and violent. And it is.

But every news agency, and political leader, and human on the street got into the action. There was more than a little panic going on: meaning contagious, mindless fear.

Come on—we've all been a little guilty of it.

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Instead of focusing on the things that were coming out of the “new normal” --- see we love normal so much that we had to start calling change the NEW normal—anyway—instead of focusing on what was positive:

- doctors, nurses and everyone in the medical field putting their lives on the line.
- People shopping for each other.
- People voluntarily masking up and keeping appropriate distance from each other to help keep everyone healthy.
- Finding new productivity and joy in working from home.

we focused on what was not the same as usual.

Don't get me wrong—the pandemic has killed our loved ones, disrupted and endangered lives, and made us frightened of each other. But there have also been wonderful things we have learned about ourselves and our world, and we need to remember them, too.

But every news story seems to stoke our fear....and we can't look away.

But Christ is born, and this new year—this 2021—we can't just remember the fear.

We know where Herod's fear took him: he killed every firstborn male child the Bethlehem area. The slaughter of the innocents.

Why do we all slip so quickly into fear when something disrupts our sense of what should be normal? Because it might bring change. And change makes us uncomfortable.

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So—when we're uncomfortable, it's even more important to follow Jesus. As we celebrate the birth of a baby, we are called to remember that with Jesus' birth gave birth to new order.

That's the thing that scared Herod the most. His order, the order that kept rich, powerful men in power—was going to be compromised.

Jesus' birth means that people everywhere will never accept that some people are better people than others. Because Jesus raised up even the lowest.

Jesus' birth means that all things are being made new. Every moment, with every breath, we can choose not to love, which often feels safer, and more justified, or we can choose to love—which takes much more bravery.

This baby, this Savior we follow, Jesus modeled outrageous, generous love in a way that makes the world sit up and take notice of this radical – unusual—unlikely-- way of being? Can we be a beacon of hope in the face of the panic in the world?

Can we remain focused on Jesus—give him homage—in the face of everything that consumes every news cycle? We can.

The Magi—the wise sages who come to see this baby—knew what was coming: a new realm of God. An era that holds up peace instead of violence. A world where hungry people, street people as we dismissively call them, are fed.

This baby will usher in a time where the poor are not talked about as lazy worthless creatures, but who are instead raised up as worthy followers.

In this world that contains the wisest in the land, and the smallest in the manger-- fear will die, and justice will become a reality for everyone, not

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just for some. Love for all will shine like a beacon, attracting everyone to its light. Amen.