

Feast of the Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12

St. Clare's Episcopal Church

7 January 2024

**In the days following Christmas, I noticed a line from a hymn from Lessons and Carols playing over and over in my head. Choir folk call this sort of thing an ear worm.**

**Typically, an ear worm persists for a day or two and then goes away. But this time, the line has continued to play in my head all week – to the point that I decided the Holy Spirit must be speaking.**

**The line from the hymn is “Love came down at Christmas,” a poem first written by Christina Rossetti, and then put to music by several composers over the years. If you would, open your hymnal to #84 and let's sing the first verse together.**

**Love came down at Christmas. As I knelt at the communion rail last Sunday, right in front of St. Clare's creche, I was struck by how the Baby Jesus is portrayed: open, exposed, and vulnerable. *This* is how love came down at Christmas.**

**Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth differently than Luke. Luke's Gospel shows us how Jesus came to be among the ordinary people. Angels announce the Savior's birth to a small group of shepherds. His earthly parents are peasants. His birthplace is a shed. The message is that the Love that comes down at Christmas is for everyone, most especially the poor and least privileged.**

In Matthew's account, Jesus is born smack in the middle of a political conundrum among those who have power and influence in the Judeo-Roman world. The Love which comes down is assumed to be a threat, a king like all other earthly kings, whose concern is with conquest and domination. The baby is hardly born before there is a plot to kill him.

But there is another angle at play in this drama. With the brilliance of a star, God invites the stranger, the foreigner, the Gentile to partake in the Love that comes down at Christmas.

Consider the response of these two groups. In one, there is resistance and fear; in the other, there is wonder and curiosity, and a natural human response to bring gifts, to share and to celebrate this thing which has come to pass.

The Gospels show us again and again that wealth, intellectual prestige, and political power make us susceptible to a false sense of who we are. Rather than bringing us closer to our true self, they trick us into an illusion of autonomy that makes no room for the Love that Comes Down at Christmas.

The star which beckons the astrologers from the east is God's invitation to come and see. These wise men appear unencumbered. They are not preoccupied by their possessions or their position in life. They pay attention to the signs all around them. They notice the star, and their wonder and curiosity beckon them to follow.

The star hovering over Bethlehem reminds me of these lines from Robert

Frost's poem, "Something Like a Star." It goes like this:

"O star, the fairest one in sight.  
We grant your loftiness the right  
To some obscurity of a cloud.  
It will not do to say of night  
Since dark is what brings out your light.

Say something to us we can learn by heart  
And when alone, repeat.  
Say something. And it says, "I burn."  
But say with what degree of heat.  
Talk Fahrenheit! Talk Centigrade!  
Use language we can comprehend.  
Tell us what elements you blend!  
It gives us strangely little aid,  
But does tell *something* in the end.

And as Keats' eremite,  
not even stooping from its sphere,  
It asks a little of us here.  
It asks of us a certain height.

So, when at times the mob is swayed  
To carry praise or blame too far  
We may choose something like a star.  
To stay our minds on

**And be staid.**

**The love that comes down at Christmas asks. This love does not demand or control. How are we to respond?**

**Meister Eckhart, a medieval mystic, writes:**

**“What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago, if I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture?”**

**In the beams of Epiphany light how will we receive and respond to the Love that comes down at Christmas?**