

Matthew 2: 1 – 12

Woodridge

“Trusting God’s Voice”

1/3/2016

A couple of weeks ago – the youth group went to LaSalette.

- Think Rick Cunningham times 100

It was a cold night – and after we got hot chocolate

- We made our way to the international exhibit of crèches or nativity sets

This a great exhibit of creches or nativity sets from all over the world.

- Portuguese villages surrounding the manger scene
- Eskimo sets with the manger as an igloo
- African sets with African animals
- Asian sets with the characters looking Asian

And I was reminded once again – that the story of Jesus’ birth

- In fact – Jesus Himself
- Is worshipped in every culture – in every part of the world

And that often each culture identifies with Jesus through their own culture.

In other words – Jesus is culturally accessible to everyone

- He transcends culture
- He stands above any one culture – or any one nation

He is the King of Kings – and Lord of Lords.

UCC symbol

- The orb or world divided into 3 parts – Jesus command in Acts for **“His disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”**
- Cross coming out of the orb
- With the crown on top

Symbolizing the kingdom of the risen Christ over all the world.

Christ for all the world – Christ for all cultures.

When we come to the end of the story of Jesus’ birth

- The story of the 3 wise men or the 3 kings
- We also find a great deal of cultural diversity

In Austria and parts of Germany and Switzerland

- Christmas does not officially end until January 6.
- The date marking the religious feast day known as Epiphany.

January 6 (Epiphany) is a legal holiday in Austria and in three states of Germany and in areas of Switzerland.

In Spain and many parts of Latin America - January 6 is the most important day for exchanging Christmas gifts.

- Children eagerly await the day, when they awake to find gifts left by the Three Wise Men (or Three Kings).

For children in many Spanish-speaking lands, this day is more important than Christmas Day itself

- when they might receive only a token gift or two.

And then there is this tradition – that Barbara and I experienced when we were in Austria a few years back.

In Austria and in Catholic regions of Germany and Switzerland

- Epiphany is also the date when people finish carrying out the traditional “C+M+B”
- it is an inscription on or above the door – a kind of “house-blessing”

For example - the inscription format for 2015 would be: **20*C+M+B+15,**

- in which the star (*) represents the star of Bethlehem
- and the three crosses (+) represent the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The C/ M/ B represent the first letters of the names of the 3 kings

Caspar/ Melchior/ Balthasar.

And so – we have cultural diversity in the birth of Jesus

- And here with the end of the story
- The story of the 3 wise men

I believe diversity is a good thing

- To be celebrated in many ways – including in the church

In fact – diversity has been part of Christianity from the beginning.

For example:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12: 12, 13

And diversity is very much a part of our country and our world.

- Both of which are getting more and more culturally and ethnically and racially diverse

There are many reasons for this

- Immigration patterns
- Ease of mobility
- A global economy
- The internet

Our world is becoming more diverse

- Our lives and our country is becoming more diverse

Some of this diversity is cultural – different cultures interacting with one another.

Some of this diversity is religious – different religions interacting with each other.

All of this can be disorienting and uncomfortable.

Sometimes it can cause fear and anxiety.

The way the early church dealt with diversity – was to center their lives and their communities on Jesus Christ.

The story of the 3 wise men offer another way for faithful people to the change related to diversity.

And that is – to trust God’s guidance in our lives.

The names we use for these 3 visitors to the birth of Jesus tell us that they had the power of education and wealth

- Wise men
- 3 kings

Normally – when a person has that much power

- They can feel pretty self-sufficient
- Without much need for God’s guidance

After all – why take guidance from God

- When it seems we have enough power on our own?

With all their education and wealth and power

- The 3 wise men should have been easily distracted from hearing God's voice and seeking God's guidance

Instead – they are powerful witnesses to a trust in God.

Evil and paranoid King Herod tries to trick them into revealing where the baby Jesus (the “king of the Jews”) is born

- Because he is threatened by the birth of a rival king
- And wants to eliminate that threat

The 3 wise men completely ignore Herod's voice as they hear God's voice in a dream

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left their own country by another road.

There is so much to love in the story of the 3 wise men

- First of all – it is a great story
- It has great traditions

- And wonderful legends

But what we often miss is that they didn't let their power

- Silence the voice of God
- Or prevent them from taking guidance from God

So much in our lives and our country and our world is changing

- Including culture/ religious/ ethnic/ and racial diversity

Change is always hard – and this change can be hard.

It can be disorienting and uncomfortable.

Sometimes it can cause fear and anxiety.

This year (like every year) – there will be many voices we can listen to.

But the question for each of us is: whose voice will we hear?

Will it be God's voice?

Will it be God's voice that we seek for guidance?

Let us pray