

John Sampson  
"Foolish Wisdom"  
Text: Matthew 2:1 - 12  
Preached at KVCC  
January 7, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer. AMEN.

"Where is the child who has been born the king of the Jews?"

These are the opening words of the wise people who had traveled from the East to Jerusalem following a star that moved, and guided them. A star that others couldn't see, or couldn't appreciate for what it actually was.

These are the words of a group of people searching and yearning for the possibility of the start of something new, and something blessed, in a world that found itself in twilight millennia ago.

These are the words of an unlikely group of astrologers that had no deep connection to the religious history of the Jews. And yet they risked a long and dangerous journey in search of a baby they believed could change the course of history.

“Where is the child who has been born the king of the Jews?”

Aren't these words also our words on this frigid winter morning?

Aren't these words also spoken from our own searching and yearning hearts, here and now?

Aren't these words also a plea from our own twilight world asking where we can finally find, finally glimpse just a small ray of hope?

This morning we find ourselves on the final day of our Christmas season, in which we have celebrated the birth of the Christ child among us, out in the world, but also deep within our own hearts.

And although we might be at the end of our Christmas story, we have really just begun the greater story of the life and ministry of Jesus.

But buyer beware.

Because this story, and the ways it invites us to transform our lives and our minds and our hearts, is filled with foolishness.

It's filled with virgin births, with demons and exorcisms, with angels and voices booming out of heaven, of deaths and resurrections.

It's the kind of story that might make your family, and your friends, and your co-workers look skeptically at you when you tell them you go to church. As one of my friends once said to me, "You know none of that stuff is true, right?" It's the kind of story that might even make you yourself wonder why you follow its invitation to experience a world thrown upside down.

This story of Jesus, and his life and ministry, is filled with foolishness, but it is also a story that is imbued with a deep wisdom, which we can experience if we just give it a chance.

The magi from the East followed a magic star, but they were still called wise in our story. This group of pagan astrologers proclaimed an impoverished boy born to nobodies a king, and they still were received with honor as vessels carrying a profound wisdom.

In interacting with Jesus and his message we will be making ourselves vulnerable to accusations of foolishness to the extent that we are open to the possibility of change within our own lives.

Because Jesus is going to tell us many odd things, including that the poor are blessed, that blessedness can be found in the most economically deprived of our nation. Does that sound like foolishness to you? In a nation where the pursuit of wealth, and the privileges it affords, are glamorized and celebrated, doesn't a statement that blessing is found among the poor, seem at best counter intuitive? It did in Jesus' time, and I think it still does today, very much so.

The amazing thing about the magi, which is so unlike the people of Jerusalem in our story, is that they don't just hear about the birth of Jesus, they put themselves in danger and travel to meet him. Our story tells us that Jesus was born among the most impoverished of the Roman Empire, that the one who overflowed with the spirit of

God showed solidarity with the poorest by living and teaching among them. This is where the magi journeyed to meet Jesus, on his terms and among his people, not theirs.

“Where is the child who has been born the king of the Jews?”

Our story tells us that he is born where we would never expect to find him, out on the margins, always on the margins. That seems foolish in its own right. But don't the magi present us with an icon of deeper foolishness? Don't they invite us to meet our Teacher outside of the walls of this church, outside of the centers of power in this country, outside of Washington and Wall Street? Perhaps not even in the United States? Don't they nudge us out of the comfort of our homes, and away from the institutions of our own importance? Don't they call us out into foolishness to meet and engage with what we think of as the radically Other?

Because it is out there, out in the places where we least expect to find him, that our story tells us that we will finally encounter the one we have been desperately searching for, the child who has been born the king of the Jews.

I love that in our story the magi returned to their homes by a different path. They met the Christ in the most unlikely of forms; they encountered the Anointed of God in a baby who was a nobody. And in their openness to the experience they were transformed. There was now a new path that they were given to travel.

This is what our story promises us too. If we open ourselves to be transformed by the message and life of Jesus, if we bring down our barriers and allow hope to be born within us, we will be fundamentally transformed. And the roads we have been walking, the paths and trajectories of our lives, will no longer be sufficient to sustain our new purpose. To those around us this change might

look like a deep foolishness. But to those of us who can see the truth held in magic stars, and virgin births, and regal nobodies, we will call it wisdom.

AMEN.