

## Following the Star, Claiming the Promises

By: Meagan McLaughlin

December 20, 2020. Have you ever had a moment when you realized that your whole life was changing, that something was emerging that you couldn't quite see yet? This year, of all years, we really need to know that there is something much bigger than us going on, that there is order in this chaos that we are living.

Readings: [2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16](#), [Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26](#), [Luke 1:26-56](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

Have you ever had a moment when you realized that your whole life was changing, that something was emerging that you couldn't quite see yet? I can think of several times when I knew that transformation and mystery was happening — and fear, even terror. When I first said out loud that I was gay. When I moved into my first apartment, living on my own for the first time. When I made the decision to leave my job of nine years and go back to school full time. And when I got the phone call from the Call Committee here at Christ Lutheran, one Sunday morning just about a year ago. My pastor at my home congregation describes me as having a look of shock and wonder and disbelief as I shared the news with her a year ago.

I'm not much of an astronomer, but my wife knows enough to be able to point out Mars and Venus and Jupiter in the sky at night, and I can usually spot them when she does. And I do enjoy looking at the stars, even if I can't find any constellation besides the Big Dipper. There is something about the stars that, like the ocean, takes me out of the minutiae of my daily life, and reminds me just how big this world is, and just how small I am.

The wise people knew far more about the night sky than I do. And although Jesus hadn't been born yet, and they had no idea what it meant, they knew because of what they saw that something was up. The wise people probably didn't suddenly see the star after Jesus' birth, and begin their journey after he had been born. They had been watching the sky for years, and the unique star that they saw probably caught their eyes months prior to that sacred night in the stable in Bethlehem. And when they saw it, they knew that the world was about to change. They knew that something was about to happen that was worth traveling for days or weeks or months, worth lying to King Herod, worth giving up their treasure for.

And soon, the wise people will be greeting a child whose birth was revealed to them by the stars they watched at night — the child whose birth, as insignificant as it might have seemed, would change everything. Jesus hasn't been born yet, but the wise people already see it coming. They are living, as we Lutherans do, in a world that is, and is not yet. Mary sang of it in our gospel today, and in our opening hymn from Holden. After hearing from the angel what was going to happen and traveling to see Elizabeth.

Mary's song is really quite remarkable, as Debie Thomas points out in her blog this week. The angel brought Mary news that would shake any unmarried teenager — she is pregnant, with no good way to explain how that happened, and by tradition and law could be easily punished, beaten, ostracized, even killed. And yet, when she greets Elizabeth, her first words are ones of deep joy: "My spirit rejoices in God." I can only imagine that her journey to Elizabeth must have been quite a wrestling — with herself, with God, reconciling and trying to understand what has just happened to her.

Mary goes on to say that God has seen her in her humanness — poor; female in a world that didn't value women; living in a brutal, occupied land; young, not yet married. God saw her just as she was, and was mindful of her. Somehow, out of all the people in the world, out of all the people in Nazareth, God saw and knew Mary intimately. And he was mindful of her.

Then Mary the prophet, who was living in a broken world, full of injustice and hunger and poverty, saw and claimed the vision of God's promise already at work. God has not only seen Mary, but all who are on the edge, as the hungry are filled and the marginalized and forgotten and abused ones are lifted up. The strong and the powerful, it seems, are already taken care of in this world, so God is especially mindful of those who have been pushed aside.

And in the middle of the world still bound with injustice and pain, Mary sang of the world she knew God was bringing into being. “He *has performed* mighty deeds with his arm; he *has scattered* those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He *has brought down* rulers from their thrones but *has lifted up* the humble. He *has filled the hungry* with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” As Mary sings, she echoes the faith and the hope of many who came before her — Hannah, and Hagar, and the psalmist, and all the prophets, who proclaimed the hope and promise that is now, but not quite yet.

Jesus hasn't been born yet, but the wise people are on their way, following signs in the world our God created that pointed to things much bigger than themselves.

And this year of all years, a year of pandemics and fires and elections and racial tensions, so much chaos, we really need to know that there is something much bigger than us going on, that there is order in this chaos that we are living. And in our time, that transformation that Mary speaks of, that the wise people saw coming, continues. Christmas isn't here yet, but we know Christ is coming. And our world is in just as much need of transformation, healing, and re-creation, as the world the wise people traveled 2000 years ago.

The prophets of today are claiming the promise anew, like Kelly Brown Douglas claiming that God is freedom, William Barber II declaring that people on the margins are seeking transformation and justice and healing and not a return to a disparate normal, Valarie Kauer's revelation that the chaos we are living in is the darkness of the womb, not the darkness of the tomb, and that it will bring new life and not death.

Jupiter and Saturn are close to aligning, and tomorrow they will come together to show us a sign. Astronomers today think that what we will be seeing in the sky if we venture out tomorrow evening after sunset is perhaps the same sign the wise ones saw so many years ago, the star that gave a glimpse of the promises of God to come that led the wise people to Bethlehem. The very same star that showed them that something new, something world-changing, was about to happen.

In this time of COVID-19, as we have stayed away from our church building for a time, we have learned what Nathan tried to tell David so long ago — God is building a house, has been building it for millennia, a house not of brick and mortar but of people, of us. And Christ Lutheran family, God is still building us up, inspiring us, breathing new life, healing, and transformation into this broken world. We can look to the skies as the wise people did, and know that Christ is coming.

We have just a few days left — I bet some of the kids could tell us even how many hours we have left — and in this moment we join all the people who for millennia have been claiming and proclaiming the

promise. This was not a one-time event that happened 2000 years ago and was complete, but a movement of the Spirit of God that began with creation and continues on today. We are not alone. We can see the star, hear the words of the angel Gabriel, and know that something new is happening. With the prophets of yesterday and today, we can embrace all the change and fear and grief and wonder that that brings. And then, we can join Mary in joy, promise, and hope, and sing with her as our spirits rejoice in the promise coming to us in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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