

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
January 8, 2017 – Epiphany
Matthew 2:1-12

It's incredible how the same event can affect different people in such completely different ways.

In today's reading from Matthew, we have a star rising in the east indicating something miraculous taking place in the world. Wise men from the East notice this star and are moved to travel a long distance to come and to pay homage to a newborn baby. When they arrive, they are overcome with joy; acknowledging this person who will change the world. They bring gifts fit for royalty and have no problem offering them to an infant lying in a stable. Then, trusting their gut, they avoid telling Herod the whereabouts of Jesus, and go home by a different route. These are truly wise men who have had their ears and eyes open, who are obedient in the true sense of the word – (from the Latin - “hearken” which means to listen). They are able *to listen* to the urgings of the Spirit and respond to it. They know that they are not in control of the future and they are open to where they will be led.

On the other hand, we have King Herod, who learns of these traveling wise men and their mission, and his response is to feel threatened. This news comes out of the blue and he is immediately motivated to do whatever he can in his power to control this unexpected development. He sees this event as a threat, not an opportunity. He is concerned only with himself: with his power and

position and controlling the future and destroying anyone and anything that comes in his way.

How often do we mistake opportunity for disaster, or try and change things that are beyond our control?

How many of us can look back on our lives and see that events that seemed terrible at the time, turned out to be times of incredible learning and blessing?

How do we develop the eyes and ears to see through the surface of events to the deep truth below?

Today we are celebrating “The Epiphany” with a capital “E.” We can celebrate it by enjoying a story from a long time ago that is familiar and may evoke fond memories from childhood. Memories of pounding out, “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” and marveling at the royal and ornate figures that edge in on the crèche/nativity.

Or.... we can allow this day to shake us up and have us think about how change has come about in our own lives. How open have we been to change? Are we reactionary, trying to control life? Or are we good listeners, ready to respond in trust to the opportunities God presents us with?

We live in a culture that supports the idea that we are masters of our own destiny. That people who are poor or struggling haven't tried hard enough. We love success stories; we love stories of people who defeat illness and death; who've set their course and risen from poverty to great wealth, who have become powerful and influential. We like to take credit for our own successes and to blame others or life for our failures. We live on the surface and fail to hearken to the

nudgings of God; we miss the stars in the skies, the dreams in the nights, the whispers in our hearts. Too often we miss the many blessings; the opportunities offered us to engage in life in real and meaningful ways.

That's why epiphanies are so special. They are moments that throw us out of our regular ways of viewing life and give us a glimpse of the breadth and depth of God's mystery, love and creativity.

Epiphanies shake us up. In ways we might enjoy, and in ways we might resist, ignore or work against.

Many of you don't know the story of how I have come to serve here at St. Mary's as a priest. I share a part of it now because many of you have asked me about my story and I continue to be amazed at how patiently and consistently God has led me. In my telling, I hope you will see God's continual invitation to new life.

This story, of course, goes back to my childhood but I will start 10 years ago, My husband Jim, recently ordained, had been appointed priest at St. John's in Ladysmith. We moved up from Victoria where we had lived for almost 20 years and where I had my own business teaching and giving talks on Nonviolent Communication. I tried to keep up my business but the distance was an obstacle (and now I wonder why??) so I let it wind down. On a "whim," I decided to go to VIU – the university in Nanaimo and complete the BA I'd never finished as a young person. (That's a whole other story!)

During this time, Jim was headhunted by Shawnigan Lake School and decided to take the job as Chaplain there, commuting until

I graduated in 2010. And then we left Ladysmith and moved into a house on the school campus where we continue to live.

I had been promised a job at the school. A job which never materialized. I waited patiently, And then not so patiently. And found myself in a new community, oriented around school life, without a clear way of getting involved. I tried different things but it soon became clear that there was no role for me and I began looking elsewhere. For the next three years I applied for jobs, volunteered with local businesses I wanted to support, started sewing the little jackets I've shown you, and doing a lot of reading. Soon I was in a pattern of walking and praying every day, journaling and wondering.... what was next? I can't say it was an easy time. It wasn't. It was a really difficult time. "Nothing" seemed to be working out. I felt very much on my own. I was in a dark night of the soul, being called inward and not knowing where it was leading. I began working with the question: "How can I truly live in the place where the depth of my own soul's calling and the deep needs of the world meet?"

In 2013, I signed up for a 2-year program with Stephen Jenkinson, a Canadian also known as the Griefwalker. As head of palliative care at a Toronto Hospital, Stephen journeyed with hundreds of people who were dying and their families and is a very wise person.

During the first residential session, I heard a couple of things that "woke me up" and changed my life. A star rose in the sky, as it were, and I began to follow it.

The first thing Stephen said that shook me up was, “Proceed as if you are needed.” He went on to suggest that each of us have come into the world at this particular time with something to offer that the world is waiting for. Everyone of us!

The second thing I heard that shook me up was the story he told about a sermon he gave while a student at seminary. Preaching on the temptations of Christ, he suggested that Christ may have been tempted a fourth time. That when he was in the desert after being tempted 3 times by Satan, he was relieved to be alone. But then Satan suggested he stay there and live a life of contemplation. But Jesus could see through that offer. As tempting as it was to stay, he knew he had to leave and involve himself in all the personalities, issues and politics of life if he was going to follow the will of God. He knew it wouldn't be easy. That was what Satan was offering – the easy way out.

After I left the week intensive, I became distressed. I realized that I was in a pattern of thinking I wasn't educated, informed, prepared enough to do what I needed to do. I was always taking yet another course or program. In essence, I was saying, I'm not good enough and was focused in on myself. Suddenly I felt the urgency to focus outwards and proceed as if I was needed. That I had to leave the comfort of my life as I knew it and get involved again. That the time had arrived to step out. I just didn't know how!

The idea came to me to offer my skills to the Diocese. I knew many clergy and could see how hard they worked. I wanted to do something to support them. So I made an appointment to see the Bishop. I had to cancel it. So I made another. The Bishop had to cancel that one. "One more time," I thought and made another appointment.

I went to see Bishop James in the new year of 2013. I told him, "I have so much to offer. How can I share my gifts with the church?" He suggested I offer my teaching and preaching skills to the clergy. But then he began asking questions I'd never considered before. We entered into one of the most profound discussions I've ever had. After a while, he became quiet and we sat in silence. Then he said, "I hear a calling to the priesthood. Have you ever considered being called in this way?" I answered immediately, "Never. It's never crossed my mind." And he asked, "Well, would you think about it?" And I laughed, "I won't be able not to!" And he gave me the names of three clergy to meet and talk with.

The rest is history. Within 4 months I was in seminary. And less than 3 years later, I was sitting in the library over there being interviewed by several of you. And here I am today.

Looking back, I can see the path that led me to you today. But looking forward, at each step of the way, I had no idea where I was being led. I just kept responding to nudgings, little and not so little. It was like stepping out into a dark night with just the faint light of the stars. Enough to lead, but not to show the whole way.

And so we proceed, knowing we were all created by the same God; created for a purpose we will never know fully; but created to

participate in this purpose which we know has to do with love, and redemption and re-creation. We proceed individually, and as a community, supporting, encouraging and challenging each other.

Knowing that we have never been alone, are not now, and never will be. We are His. And He feeds and leads us.

Amen.