

Sermon: Our Three Kings
Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: January 2, 2022

We can read stories like this in our sacred scriptures and approach them in a multitude of ways to get at the meaning and truth of them. We can read them literally, as a historical account of what happened 2000 years ago. We can read them as analogy and consider how this story speaks to our contemporary situation. And we can read such a story in our scriptures as metaphor to hear what it reveals of the stories and realities of our own individual and corporate lives. And with all of that we are just unpacking some of the richness available to us in these sacred stories.

So this morning for just a moment I want to approach this story of the Magi come to visit the Christ Child in Matthew as metaphor and specifically as metaphor for the internal reality in our psyches and see how it speaks to us that way. I call this sermon “Our Three Kings” because I want to suggest that in each of us there exists the 3 Kings of this story. But notice that we don’t know how many Magi, wise people, or Kings came to offer gifts to the Christ child, we only know that there were 3 gifts they brought – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – so I’m not saying there are 3 Magi Kings within us. Rather we each have a King Herod, a Christ the King, and Magi Kings within us. Ready to dig in?

So we each have a little threatened and at times threatening tyrant King within us. Maybe for some of us he’s less little than in others but we’ve all got one in us, whether we are male, female, nonbinary, we’ve got a King Herod in us. You know him, right? He’s the one who is in control and likes to stay that way.

He's the one that has the power and can define what's true and what's not and who is right and who is wrong and really, really doesn't like it when that power to decide and determine and control is threatened. The Little King Herod in Each of Us is a manipulator, presents a nice and accommodating face while working behind the scenes to position himself in the way that makes him look the best and maintains his control, sometimes that behind the scenes is not just deceptive to the people around him but even deceptive to himself. He presents as reasonable, fair, and interested and even believes that of himself, all the while he's positioning and posturing for his own benefit above all else. And if things work out for our little Internal King Herod we might not ever know that he is anything but a reasonable and fair King. But God forbid, he doesn't get what he wants or it doesn't work out for him or he is made to look the fool and that's when the true tyrant shows up, the anger if not rage surfaces which reveals just how important that control was to him and he goes and kills all the newborns in a horrifically over-sized response to the threat he was actually facing. As unpleasant a character as he is, we've all got one of him in us. Likely you know him well, but if you wonder where he is, start by looking where you are most insecure in your life, what you are most threatened by, where anger rises in you, what you get anxious about, and King Herod will be lurking around somewhere in that neighborhood, ready to make a mess of things if you are not careful.

But thankfully, all of us have 2 other Kings in us as well. We've all also got the polar opposite of the King Herod within, we've all got a Christ the King in us too. To be gender inclusive here we can refer to Christ the King as Christ the Queen, if you prefer, because we shouldn't get stuck on the maleness even though I'm referencing 3 Kings cause Christ the King is in each of us whatever

gender we are and She is tethered immediately and directly to God Godself. She is the image of God present in all human beings, our very best selves, all that is good and right in our own minds and hearts and psyches is the Christ within us. She is wisdom, she is love, she is even guilt when we know we've done something wrong and then repentance and change. She is that part of us that values and prioritizes relationship and community above all else and will sacrifice herself for the sake of relationship if that sacrifice can save others. That is the Christ the King within us. She is the one who once we peel away all the fear and selfishness and darkness, the pride and greed and slothfulness of the "I don't care anymore" who still abides there as a shining star in the darkness of our selves revealing that we do care and will give our all to what is most important. Some of us for whatever reason don't believe as much in Christ within us as we can accept and believe that we have a Herod within us. But it doesn't matter what we believe cause Christ is within us anyway and holds all this is good and right and lovely right at the heart of our very selves. If you haven't noticed Christ within lately, take sometime of stillness and prayer, consider who you love and when you are most given to others and centered, and it's in that neighborhood that Christ within will be found.

But what's cool is that there's also within us a 3rd King and the 3rd king is not a he or she but the 3rd king is a THEY which are the Magi Kings within us. They are the ones guided by a star to the Christ within, they bridge the gap between the King Herod within us and the Christ within. Because we all do have power and we do control things to some extent in our lives and we all are the little sovereigns over our little plot of existence that is US in the world. God granted us a certain amount of sovereignty there and it is a beautiful thing. The only questions or

issue at hand is whether we use that sovereignty toward the ends of Herod or Christ. The Magi Kings within us notice the star over the Christ and direct us there, even when we take the wrong turn or get off track altogether there's a star, a true north that The Magi King recognizes and begins to turn again to follow, again and again. And as they go they collect our power and control and treasures and our gifts - despite that little tyrant aspect of ourselves that want those directed towards our own good and for our own benefit and even at the expense of others - and they come and lay them before the Christ within. They notice and respect the little tyrant for the power and danger that he poses but they bring the gifts before the Christ within and they don't need to do anything more than that. They are ok, kneeling there and then moving on without getting anymore credit or focus than that. They are the perfect merging of power and humility, bowing themselves and hand it all over to the Christ. They don't deny that they have power, they aren't ashamed of the wealth and control that they do have, they simply place it in service in honor of Christ. This we might consider is the willful part of ourselves that can overcome our Herod instincts and direct our thoughts, our actions, our emotions towards Christ the King. The Magi King within knows the various neighborhoods within us and works to clean up the streets that Herod has ravaged and direct us towards the Christ-hood. And those are Our Three Kings – our three kings, oriented within, come with grace, purpose and sin... actually, we'll just leave the carol alone but you get the idea.

As this new year opens to us and we take the next best steps we know how in these early days of an unknown year, may we bring the Christ within our gifts and attention and kneel there a while to give Christ reign on the streets of the city of our souls. Amen.

Invocation and Lord's Prayer

O God of light and peace, whose glory shining in the child of Bethlehem, still draws the nations to yourself, bless us abundantly and dispel the darkness that shrouds our path, that, like the wise ones of old we may come to kneel before Christ in true worship, offer Him our hearts and souls and return from his presence to live as he taught us to love, now and forever as we pray in his name: Our Father...

Benediction

And I said to the one who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And the one replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than any known way."

May you go forth into this new year with your hand in God's and go where God will send you... amen.