

Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 4, 2015 (Epiphany of our Lord)

Listen again to the Word of the Lord . . .for you. . . from Isaiah a prophet. Listen...
Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon *you* (!).
For darkness shall cover the earth, thick darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you;
Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, . . .abundance. . .wealth. . .
gold and frankincense and praise to God.

They will come to the brightness of your dawn. They will come to you. Ok, who is coming and why? What do they want? What are they bringing? What is given, what is received? Who benefits? Israel might have heard this prophesy and thought, "Ok, they will bring us goods, and we will give them the Word of God. We have the Word, we have the truth, and they can share their stuff with us.

Has that at times been the church's attitude? But isn't the truth for Israel and the church of Jesus Christ instead that in order for the Light to come and true glory to arise, to chase away the darkness of despair, there must be a relationship—a mutual giving and receiving, a sharing, listening, learning, caring? Is the reality that we all need each other and have so much to learn from each other and can gain soul strength from the relationships? Something inside of us tells us it's all about me. Me. But it's not, as you know. It's all about us. Us is humanity and every other living thing on this planet. The proclamation is before us constantly. It's up to us whether we embrace it or push it aside.

Light. Glory. Shining forth. Radiance. Rejoicing. These are qualities and experiences which can only be known by *us* rather than *me*. For example,

The Magi come to the royal Herod *and* the holy family. Both hear the proclamation of Jesus' birth as king of the Jews. Now Herod takes this proclamation as a threat. Mary and Joseph cherish this word as good news. The treasure is not only the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but the proclamation of the Word from God. That real treasure is received when they listen to the word and take hope in it.

Herod makes plans to destroy the child king. Mary and Joseph make plans to protect and nurture him. Herod takes offense, the Holy family finds joy and gladness. Both will know pain. The difference is not in the struggle and pain of their lives, but in their ability to walk with it and continue to be open to the presence of God and holy mystery. These are revealed in all of creation and the wisdom gathered around those who will listen.

Poor Herod. He is intimidated by the word of a holy child. He is afraid of love and mercy. He is afraid of losing control. He is closed to the Epiphany of Christ, to the Good News of love and healthy relationships of interdependence. Herod has learned to mistrust everyone in his family and politics so that he even dreads the glad, holy word of strange priestly prophets. He has become death incarnate, living destruction, paranoia leading to alienation and despair. He does

not understand the mutuality of life, the joy of giving and receiving. He is lost without hope because he has closed himself off. Poor Herod. Even with his grand wickedness of wiping out the infants in an entire region to stomp out this threatening child, Messiah King, he is a poor, poor man weighed down with riches and power—iron chains around his neck. Personally I believe he is among those leaders in Israel's history, like the first king, Saul, who are mentally ill. Many other leaders throughout history fall prey to the same schemes of paranoia, desperation and violence—closed off from hope, closed off from healthy, healing relationships of mutual giving and receiving. God help the Herods.

The magi and the holy family leave quietly, with very little power to make things happen, receiving along their way, the simple, holy gifts which God gives. Gifts of gratitude, hope, inner peace to the best of anyone's ability to know these illusive gentle gifts.

Yes, Mary and Joseph have opened themselves radically to God's word of hope and peace. There is terror around and about. But they know that they are not alone. They can trust the word from God and friends. They are in relationship. They can hope, even if in trouble. It will be ok in God's time and by God's proclamation, on God's terms which are always more sure than the fabrications of our own feeble minds—which are driven here and there by random forces, more sure than our own grasping after desperate false hopes, dreams, even our theological claims on God.

How much better to throw in our lot with the holy family and the magi who quietly, hopefully receive what God gladly gives as they walk into the darkness with a power much, much greater than their own. With open hands. In relationship with friends and all of creation. Together in faith.

Let us continue to learn to pray with open hands. This week, remember the holy family and their openness to God's Spirit in all of its mysterious goodness and peace. Amen.