

A sermon preached at St. George's Anglican Church Calgary, by the Rev. Clara King, January 7 2018

The Feast of the Epiphany (translated)

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in Your sight O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer. **Amen.***

The two great movements of the entire Christian story are contained in our Gospel reading this morning. One: God comes to meet us, where we are; and two: God invites us to go on a journey.

Jesus, the Word of God, through whom all things were made, is incarnated, made flesh, made human being, in order to live among us. Why? Because from the foundation of the world, God wished to be close to us; God wished to have relationship with us. We pulled away from God's love; we pulled away from God's grace, but that didn't stop God from loving us, and wishing to have a relationship with us.

Down through the ages, God tried. God tried threats; God tried bribery; God tried rewarding us for good behaviour; God tried sending prophets to show us and tell us how profoundly we were messing things up! But we are amazingly resourceful at ignoring and avoiding God's pointed messages to us.

In the end, this was something God had to do personally. It wasn't working to invite us into God's life, so God entered into our lives. God became human in the person of his Son, in order to meet us exactly where we are.

This is something we proclaim every Sunday, in our prayers and our Creeds and our Eucharistic celebrations - it's easy to overlook how intensely beautiful it is. That God wishes to have a relationship with us *so much*; God loves the world *so much* that he got down out of the heavens, and came to meet us in the most intimate of ways. In our flesh and our skin and our struggles and our flaws. And our stubbornness, and our short-sightedness and our frailty. God came to meet us in the midst of what makes us most deeply human.

This is the heart of the Christian story. That God came to meet us, here, in the midst of our lives, right where we are - in the midst of our doubts and struggles; in the midst of our cruelty and our shallowness; whether we're great saints, or whether we're dreadful sinners - God knows it all, and God comes to meet us anyway, because God cares deeply about us and longs to have a relationship with us.

And so God became flesh to dwell among us; a tiny baby, nestled in a manger, already meeting mother, step-father, shepherds, animals, and now wise men from the East.

That is the first movement that has happened in our Gospel today. But that one movement isn't enough.

Today we meet the three wise men from distant lands. God had sent an invitation, in the form of a star, calling, enticing, inviting these visitors to come to him. And they are forever changed by their journey.

This is the second movement: God offers an invitation to each and every one of us to go on a journey. The invitation is tailored for each one of us, individually. God holds out his hand, and longs for us to say yes and take our next step forward.

The Christian story is composed of these two movements, that cannot be divided. The grace with which God comes to meet us is matched by his eternal invitation, to join him on the journey of redeeming the world.

God sees us with grace, and loves us as we are - and God at the same time has dreams and hopes and ideas for us to move forward. Think of all the cruelty in the world; think of the millions who are oppressed and starving and desperate for safety and clean water and access to medicine. God has dreams for a better world than this, and God has dreams for how each and every one of us can be part of that better world.

So God meets us where we are, loves us as we are now, and yet still holds out personalized invitations for us to be part of his great work of redeeming the world. And God longs for us to say yes.

A personal story: I know without a doubt that God loves me. Yet I don't always make God proud. A few weeks ago, a clergy friend and I fell into gossip about

some of our clergy colleagues, and some of the challenges currently facing the Diocese. We didn't mean anything by it, but soon I found myself saying some things that I regretted later - some harsh, unforgiving things.

I kept thinking about it all over Christmas. The tone of voice I'd heard myself use; the lack of respect in what I was saying; the lack of compassion; how I brushed away more sensitive ways of thinking about their actions and attitudes. Thinking about it afterward, I did not feel proud of myself. That's the sort of tone and style of talking about other people that I grew up with, and a beautiful part of my journey into Christ has been learning to talk and think in a very different way.

And so the other day, I confessed to my friend how disappointed I was with myself. She tried to reassure me that the things I said weren't at all incorrect, and were probably less negative than I remembered, but it doesn't actually matter.

The fact is: this is not how I want to *remain* as a Christian. I want to step more deeply into a pattern of speaking respectfully, and giving other people the benefit of the doubt; and to un-learn that harsh, unforgiving attitude I'm familiar with from my childhood.

And so whether I was wrong or not wrong in that conversation doesn't matter. What matters is learning to grow beyond it. Learning to shape my mouth and my thoughts and my heart a different way, to take another step forward in my Christian journey.

But God was there with me every moment, still loving, still caring, still close - and still inviting me to go another way, and learn how to live into grace just a little more.

God always meets us where we are, with love; and God always invites us to take another step. That, my friends, is the Christian story. That's the story we tell, every Sunday. That's the story we rehearse with one another in our services. And that's the story that God is unfolding, right now, in all our lives. Right now, God is with you, right where you are. And right now, God is holding out an invitation just for you: perfectly tailored to this exact moment in your life.

And the question is: what would happen in your life right now, if you said yes?