

Sermon preached 1 January 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Second Sunday after Christmas/Epiphany Sunday

## ***“Listening”***

For the Eastern church, the Festival of the Three Kings is older and more important than Christmas.

Look carefully at Matthew’s account and you will see this is not a birth story, but a childhood story --- separated from the stable and shepherds and distance from home.

Thus we have a distinct message in today’s way of organizing worship.

Whereas at Christmas we emphasized the small and personal, today the scene is large and public.

We are teaching ourselves life has a larger meaning.

What we say and how we live fans out into the universe. What happens to us has roots. Nothing going on now lacks consequences for future generations.

It is an inspiring moment for people as rich and powerful as we. Read the “Letters to the Editor” and see how ready we are to lecture: On parenting, on politics, on faith. In this free nation, we have been bred to think broadly. From the Peace Corps to the War on Poverty, the Marshall Plan, and all the mission programs we read of each week in our Global Ministries Prayer Calendar, we are surrounded by signs of reaching out, putting our money where our mouth is, BEING the change we want to see, as Gandhi put it.

The down side of such dreaming and doing is a certain blindness and deafness. If you are on fire with a message, if you’ve “built a better mousetrap,” it’s hard to wait for another agenda.

Very unattractively, Herod models for us today.

Think of it. You don't ask a king where the new king is --- yet that is what the Wise Men inquired of Herod. They were logical: They went to the top local authority; but in so doing, they threatened him and all around him.

That is our predicament as well. Deep in our hearts, we know we have too much of the world's goods, and that, even so, we are not fairly divided among ourselves.

It is stunning to hear the Biblical message of peace and sharing in the midst of all the advertising and protecting our culture is full of. To be told we are afraid to let go of our wealth and security is deeply unsettling and confusing.

Yet that is the good news of Jesus. There is enough for everybody, and until everybody has enough, we will all suffer and sin.

From the beginning, God has been making that obvious. Now, as Paul tells the Ephesians, it is home-grown wisdom. The same impulse that brought us to the water of baptism, or that brought our parents and friends to present us for dedication --- that same inner energy pushes us to share all the basics with whomever we see who needs.

What WE need to learn, what the church when it is healthy teaches, is how to listen. Other people know what they need better than we. Time and again, leaders rise up who tell us. That takes courage --- and it takes courage on our part to listen.

As we start the New Year with John Wesley's Covenant Service of recommitment to Jesus, let us see it as our promise to be still, to give up cynicism, to BELIEVE God really does teach us how to serve others wisely.

If we do that, we will be a light to other people, and this small congregation will lead the Conference in becoming 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians.

It is that inspiring.

It is that uncomfortable.

It is the larger view of God through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

***Arthur Dan Gleckler, pastor***