

Sermon
Christmas 2
St. Andrew's, Methuen
January 3, 2021
William Bradbury

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a
Psalm 84 or 84:1-8
Matthew 2:1-12

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

Were you able to see a couple of weeks ago the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter—called sometimes the Christmas star? It was the first time they have been this close together in the night sky for 800 years. Unfortunately, as I looked at the western horizon all I could see were clouds.

But even if I had been able to see it, I doubt I would have been impressed, because the night sky to the west of my house is filled with the lights of Drum Hill shopping area.

But more importantly I am, like you, a child of the enlightenment who was raised to see stars as gaseous giants and planets as dead rocks floating through cold, empty, meaningless space.

They mean little to us unless we majored in astronomy.

They are not nearly as important as the lightbulb in my reading lamp or the glow in my smartphone.

The scientific revolution, born out of the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, has given us many wondrous and transforming things: a high standard of living for one, and a Covid-19 vaccine for another. **I am not an anti-science guy, and I will happily get my vaccine the moment they tell me I can.**

Yet, we must also admit it has brought many terrible things—like the technology used in two world wars which enabled us to kill millions of our sisters and brothers.

In objectifying the world so we could work on it, we also disenchanting it, robbing it of inherent dignity, charm, or mystery. We see ourselves as separate from other people and things, making it is easy to use and misuse them for our own selfish ends.

So, I ask: when was the last time we looked up at the stars with a sense of wonder and awe? When was the last time we looked at the people stocking the shelves at the grocery store, with wonder and gratitude for risking themselves to keep us alive?

The Magi grew up in a very different world—a world in which creation is **experienced as a luminous web of connection**, so that if some new sign appears in the night sky, they assume something special must have happened on earth. And likewise, if there is some special occurrence on earth, like the arrival of a new king, there would be a sign in the heavens.

**“O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.”**

The Magi follow the bright light to Jerusalem and to King Herod, because if you’re looking for a newborn king, you start at the palace of the current king.

As others have said, the star gets the Magi to the right country, but leads them to the wrong house and the wrong King.

In order to find the right house, the Bible must be consulted where they learn from the prophet Micah that the baby who is “King of the Jews” is to be born in Bethlehem.

You may know that the Bible makes an almost complete rejection of the use of astrology: but not because the Bible holds a modern scientific worldview that thinks astrology is nonsense. But because astrology too often leads to lesser gods and smaller truths, instead of to the Realm of the One True God.

Today Astrology is a multi-billion-dollar industry. Some are looking for a reconnection to creation that existed before science and technology disenchanting the world.

Others use astrology hoping to enhance their success, money and power. When I was in high school, I’d read in the morning paper the short blurb about my sign, I’m a Libra, hoping to get an edge on my classmates.

The Magi worship the infant King with their gifts **of gold, frankincense, and myrrh** as a sign of their willingness to let Christ be their firm foundation, not the stars, either those in the sky or those living in palaces who claim they alone can fix our problems.

So, to want to see the world again, not as a thing, and an object to use and misuse, but as a luminous web, an enchanted place, the temple of God, requires that we grow beyond our modern worldview.

When we were young, growing up meant rejecting one worldview, as we embrace a new one. We reject what we thought when we were ten, so we can embrace our 13-year-old self.

My generation went so far as to say the worldview of our parents was fatally flawed such that we shouldn't trust anyone over 30!!

This way of **transcend and reject—rise to the new and reject the old**, leads to stunted, immature growth. The way forward, instead, is **to transcend and include**. Yes, accept new truth, but include what works from the old.

Jesus put it this way: "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Of course, some of us only cling to the old and reject the new, which is equally immature.

We don't have to reject either the mystery of Christ or the power of science. **We can grow in our trust in Christ and also get the vaccine.**

We can learn what science has to teach about the planets and the stars, but we can also join Saint Francis in calling our closest heavenly lights, "Brother Sun and Sister Moon."

The Magi are men of wisdom and wealth, comfortable in their homes in Persia, yet they leave all that behind to follow a deep call to find the newborn King of the Jews.

My father used to tell me and my siblings when we would complain about something, **"You're too young to be comfortable."**

That remains as true for me at 69 as it was at 9. 2020 showed us all how temporary and insecure our comfort has really been. We too must always be on the journey to the King of the Cosmos, revealed in scripture most fully in the crucified and risen Christ.

How might we be on the way in 2021—not to more wealth, comfort, and a slimmer body, but to more allegiance to Christ and love of our neighbor, living as Temples of God?

I would suggest each of us commit to some new spiritual practice: maybe daily Bible reading and silent meditation-- that we might find anew in the ordinariness of our lives the Maker and Redeemer of all.