

ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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JUST LOOK UP

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Text of a Sermon preached the Second Sunday of Christmas

January 2, 2022

ISAIAH 60:1-6 | PSALM 72:1-7,10-14
EPHESIANS 3:1-12 | MATTHEW 2:1-12

The most popular movie on Netflix this season is entitled Just Look Up. It is a star studded drama comedy of two average astronomers discover a fact that should change our lives, but strangely enough, because of our capacity to deny reality, on both a human and cultural level, because of our trust in technology, because of our greed and pride, this fact does not.

A comet is coming straight at us and will destroy the earth. “Just look up” the title and the characters say, but we refuse to.

As long as humans have felt the tug of the moon and tides, and understood that geography is destiny, we have dared to look up and ask what the movement of heavenly bodies mean. And even if they kept their secrets from us, they guided us to where we wanted to be, or where we thought we needed to be.

Today we are invited to look up and see a star. A star rising in the East, moving to the West, and revealing secrets long hidden from the foundation of the world. If we look up, if we follow it, it will guide us to ask the right questions, it will show us where wisdom can be found, it might shine on ways to think about how to live our lives.

At the time of Jesus’ birth there were plenty of impressive portents from to consider. In the year 37 BCE, the poet Virgil wrote his Fourth Eclogue, a beautifully written poem about the immanent expectation of a man sent down from heaven whose birth would inaugurate a new age. Two Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, wrote of the expectation of a world leader to arise out of Judea [Tacitus Ann. 5.13 and Suetonius Bell. 3.399-408; 6:310-15].

Finally, seven years before Jesus’ birth, Halley’s Comet made its circuit through our skies. Three years before Jesus’ birth, Jupiter and Saturn were in alignment three times.

The planet Jupiter signified a king while Saturn was routinely associated with the Jews. All this would have fueled local political and religious speculation, and King Herod’s insecurity. Finally, a year before Jesus’ birth, Chinese astronomers recorded sighting a supernova, a bright light suddenly appearing in the night sky.

This star, much like the comet in the movie, is become the subject of much speculation, of kings and presidents, of scholars and scientists, for all those who worry about how to save a planet, or who only think about how to make a profit from knowledge. And so three sages from the East, from the cradle of civilization, from the center of science and learning, set out out to see what the sign might mean.

And to show they are wise, they bring three universal and time tested gifts. Gold for a king, incense for a priest, burial spices for a prophet. What is wisdom if it cannot tell you how to live your life?

What shines so bright about the ancient star of Epiphany are the gifts that remind us, that if true wisdom is to be found, it will be in the shape of a human life well lived.

The Word has become flesh and dwelt among us. The divine Logos has taken on human form. The shape of that life will tell us what we need to know about the shape of ours. How is Christ to be our ideal, how will we become like him?

When a child is born we know the wonder of total possibility. There is a gift for each stage. The beginning. The middle. The end.

Gold for success. Incense for the process of growing into maturity, for gaining the knowledge of the tribe, of being initiated into the ways of God. The incense will be burning as we find him in his Father's house, attending to his Father's business.

Finally, the spice of a body at burial. Myrrh. Truly wise souls among us know that our lives gain their meaning from who and what we decide to live for. Who or what will we give everything for. Or more precisely, what we will die for. When we die, what will our life amount to.

What I love to think about today is how I'm this story, we are invited to think about what true wisdom is. We are invited to think about the wisdom we need right now to live as we should, to take our greed and pride, and look reality in the face.

So today, the title of a blockbuster movie might just hold a key. Certainly it holds much much food for thought.

How should we live? Let the one whose birth was celebrated by a star and wise ones from the cradle of civilization point the way. Gather your treasure, light a sweet smelling lamp in honor of that the Word became flesh, and hold fast to the spices that anoint a body at death. Think about each one.

And as you kneel before the mystery, just look up, look into his eyes, and listen for how you should live. For he is your ideal. In your way, become like him. Amen.

