

Wendy Amos-Binks – Jan 5, 2020

Follow that Star

Matthew 2:1-12

²In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “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.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Today's sermon is about following your Star... I'm sure you've heard this expression before...maybe there's even a song. Follow that star...that is certainly what the magi did in our Gospel story today.

I wonder whether any of you have ever heard the Russian folk tale of Baboushka. Baboushka means 'Grandmother' in Russian and Ukrainian. She was an energetic and dedicated young woman who kept a spotless little house by the roadside in Russia, long, long ago. She had fair hair as many people of the steppes do because they spend long days in the bright sunshine on the wheatfields. Baboushka loved her home and took great pride in keeping it spotless. She loved to bake bread in her little oven...dough kneaded from the wheat in the fields surrounding her home. One night, after carefully placing her kneaded dough into the oven, she ventured out into the cold, starry night to sweep the snow from her path. Before long she heard the tinkle of little harness bells, she recognized them...they meant the approach of a camel caravan. Mingled with the smell of her baking bread, she caught a whiff of frankincense, perfume of kings and burnt by priests as offerings to God. She rarely smelled this, it was very costly and so scarce,...she sensed something special in the air. But she resisted the urge to stop sweeping...she wanted to get her path done before it was time to check her bread. So she kept sweeping, barely looking at the strange entourage which was passing by her door. When the end was in sight, one of the riders dismounted and approached her. He was very dark-skinned and wore the robes of the priests of the East, the smell of frankincense was now overpowering. His eyes sought hers, as he explained. They were following a special star. This star would lead them to a great spiritual leader who had been born. Would she care to join them? Join them? she hesitated, a small frown on her forehead. No, thank you...impossible...she was too busy...bread to bake, sweeping to do, a list of chores for the next day and the next. No thank you she said and they bowed to one another. The caravan moved on...the tinkle of bells and smell of frankincense faded. But Baboushka felt different. She didn't sleep well that night...in her little bed she could see the star winking down at her, she felt the eyes of the strange priest gazing into hers, and by morning, Baboushka's heart was so restless that she decided she **must** after all leave her chores. She **must** catch up with the caravan in search of the special child. Baboushka's story is rather sad, because she never does catch up with the caravan. She spends the rest of her life searching the cribs of babies, leaving each a little present just in case it was the Christ child. Baboushka's is the story of 'missed opportunity'. Poor little Baboushka...what is the difference between her and the Magi?

Very simply, the difference is that of “following & finding”. The Magi followed the star. It took them far from their familiar surroundings. But God was calling even these strangers ...By following the star, by taking a step into the unknown, they found Christ and experienced great joy. They were fulfilled,...filled full of joy when they found the Christ child. It is suggested that their costly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh gave the little family the means to escape to Egypt and may even funded Jesus’ ministry later. There is also the suggestion that the Magi remained in touch with Jesus throughout his life, perhaps wondering if he could be their king. In contrast, Baboushka was empty (like the doll), yearning as we all do to be filled, but unfulfilled, empty. She missed her opportunity to encounter the Christ child, the Divine.

We as individual Christians and as a community of Christians, face today, the same choice the Magi and Baboushka faced. We still have to decide whether or not to follow and find Christ. The Magi looked beyond their daily domestic lives to the big night sky. They paid attention to what was happening around them. They may have had to wrench themselves away from their studies & plans, from what was comfortable and familiar, but they did. They were willing to step out into the unknown to follow the star because they desired beyond anything the joy of finding Christ. The disciples had to do the same when Jesus called them to be ‘fishers of men’.

In our lives we face this choice too, moments of decision when we must decide whether to follow or not...moments when we are not sure what we will find. It may be as simple as deciding to attend a Bible study...during Lent or to let a prayer form in our inner world or to volunteer at the Community breakfast. We all have to admit that we are often like Baboushka. We get caught in our busyness; too busy for what really matters.

But as a community I feel we are a Magi people...bound by our love of Christ to follow his star, led by the Holy Spirit to find him born anew.

Let us have the wisdom of the wise men who travelled far to find Christ in an unlikely place. Let us be willing as they were, to step out of our comfort zone, to follow the star to Christ and to find him in unlikely places. Then we will be filled with the joy that the wise men felt. Amen