

Spiritual Imagination - January 3, 2021

Matthew 2:1-12

The beginning of a new year is always a time of hope. There's no logical reason for it, but changing the numbers of the calendar year somehow signifies that the past is less important and the future has a great deal to offer. In the space of 24 hours -- from December 31 to January 1, our whole outlook in life can change.

There is something special about this day. We are celebrating the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of the New Year. It is a helpful and hopeful reminder that whatever we may accomplish this year will be done with the help of Jesus Christ. The sacrament reminds us that we can do nothing on our own but only through the grace that God has given us in the gift of God's only Son.

Yet, what are we getting excited about? In other words, what do we want to happen in 2021? What's going to be different this year than last year? What will change about our life, our health, our work, our families, and our nation that will make it 2021 better? These are some of the answers we're looking for. You might be optimistic, indifferent, or pessimistic about 2021. Nevertheless we are all engaged in a search.

We are searchers. Many of us find the position of being searchers somewhat uncomfortable. As a rule, we do not like uncertainty. We like having a certain view of the world and how it works. Yet, we really should not be surprised to be searchers. Searching has been part of the Christian life since at the beginning. Today, we honor the first searchers associated with Jesus Christ. Today we remember the story of the three wise men.

In fact, the number three usually associated with the wise men is not exactly true. Nowhere does the account in Matthew's gospel say how many wise men there actually were. It does mention that there were three gifts so we might assume there were three givers. However, all we know is that several men came from the East and visited Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. Even so, the visit took place not when he was newborn but possibly two years after he was born. At Christmas, we like to compress the story of Jesus' birth. However, the wise men were latecomers to the party. They were searchers like us. Apparently, it took a long time for them to find what they're looking for.

What the wise men found was a toddler. Somehow, in the little boy named Jesus, the wise men were able to see the future. They were able to imagine that this boy would grow up to be the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. They could use their imaginations and look beyond the shack Mary and Joseph lived in. They could look beyond the poor clothes and poverty of the Holy Family's life. They could see in the boy that God was doing something new and fresh. When

they left, the wise men were satisfied because they could see -- not with their eyes, but with their spirits. They found what they sought.

Friends, seeing with our spirits makes all the difference as we begin a new year. We are searchers, just as the wise men were. All we know is that changes are going to happen. Our relationships will change, some for the worse; others for the better. Our health will change: some will get sick; some will improve. Our jobs may change. Our nation will change. The world will change. All these changes are certain.

Hear the good news. We all have the power to respond to changes. We can respond to events. We can choose to be disappointed when things do not work out as we planned or we can accept new circumstances and adapt ourselves to them. The wise men arrived to meet the child Jesus not knowing what to expect. They could have been very disappointed to find Jesus living in a lowly hut. Yet, they were not. They saw Jesus in poverty yet they gave him the same honor and treatment they would to any prince or king. The wise men chose not to be disappointed but chose to accept the situation as they found it even when their search may not have turned out as they planned. Instead they responded to what they found with creativity and imagination.

We have the power to use our imaginations to respond to the situations life give us in a positive way. At the same time, we have the power to make ourselves very sad when we receive answers we do not expect. In short, we can make the most of life as it comes, or we can be angry because we sometimes don't get our way. Imagination in the spirit will make all the difference as to whether 2021 will be a bad year or the best year we've ever had.

Today we gather around a virtual common table. Some may look at this table and see a cup we use for dinner filled with a few drops of juice. Some may see some the same plates on which we place desert just a slice of ordinary bread. Some may ask what this juice and bread really mean. Well, without imagination, these things are not even a decent snack for preschooler. However, with imagination, these become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. They remind us of his real presence with us in our lives. If you have spiritual imagination, you can know this. If you choose not to use your spiritual imagination, then the Lord's Supper really has no significance for you.

The power of the spirit makes this sacrament real for us. The power of spiritual imagination allowed wise men 2000 years ago to see a poor baby as God Almighty. The power of spiritual imagination will give you the ability to live, learn, and grow in 2921 as you search for your answers. The power of imagination is real and is under your control – but only if you choose to use it.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.