

Spring Lake Presbyterian Church, USA
Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway
January 6, 2008

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

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.'"⁷ Then 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.

In the Fullness of Time

With all the whirlwind of activities, it seems difficult for me to believe that today marks the end of the twelve days of Christmas! Only 12 days ago we heard Luke's words proclaiming the Good News: "*And while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first born son, and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate the fullness of time, when peace on earth and good will to all becomes not only possible but imperative. For God-with-us, the little child born in a humble stable, glaringly shatters our darkness and completes all of our waiting.

But as we look around and the fighting continues and stories of assassinations ripple on TV screens and people continue to suffer and experience pain (ourselves included), we don't always believe that God-with-us, Emmanuel, has been born. Rather, we wonder if the waiting must continue, if there must be another year of following the star. So we count down yet another year as time marches on and the ball drops over Times Square. 5-4-3-2-1-HAPPY NEW YEAR! Or at least we hope it's happy.

Time is a mind-boggler. While it is a self-imposed construct formulated to communicate order, it is also the one thing to which we completely offer ourselves. But chronos time – the time of calendars and clocks – fails to recognize the fullness of time. As long as we limit ourselves to chronos time, we will continue to look forward to the fullness of time which is to come somewhere at the end of our calendar. Ecclesiastes tells us: *He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.* And as long as we limit ourselves to living within the constructs of chronos time, we will agree with the writer of Ecclesiastes that all is meaningless, that we just don't see God breaking into our chronos.

However, if we are to announce to the world that Christ is born, that God is with us, then we urge ourselves and each other to live in a different, fuller time. Kairos is the time outside of time, the time in which all is complete, the time where incarnation is a reality, and time is full in each moment.

Children are able to live in kairos time much easier than adults. I watched my girls this year – ages 6 and 8 – as they counted down the days until Christmas. While they were constricted by a calendar, they were also living within the wonder of the moment. While I was buying and wrapping gifts, decorating and baking, preparing sermons and trying to scramble together everything that must be finished by the end of the year, my girls were treasuring every moment of the season. They sipped hot cider, slowly savoring the wonderful aroma of the moment. They decorated the tree one branch at a time, not wishing to hurry, but to appreciate the memories of the ornaments they had placed in the past. They shopped vigorously for the perfect gift for each person on their lists. They demanded Christmas carols in the house and stamped Christmas cards by hand. And they exuded ENERGY!!!! that only comes in living in the moment. My energy was exhausted by my own self-imposed deadlines, but they had only time . . . a time that dragged on and on and on. They were living in kairos time, the time that interrupts our chronos time and demands that we pay attention to every detail.

But as adults we operate in chronos while yearning for Kairos – the fullness of time. We yearn for completeness. And the good news is that the fullness of time is not something for which we must wait – it is not some far-off date at the end of a timeline – the fullness of time is already here. (The beautiful the beautiful river that flows by the throne of God is here, in this time!) When we recognize Incarnation, when we realize that the Christ child has been born in our midst, when we observe God-with-us, Emmanuel, then we can also observe that Kairos has broken into our Chronos. Our linear time is usurped by incarnation. And when we recognize God-With-Us, our lives and every moment of our lives become richer and fuller.

Today's Gospel Lesson from Matthew is a story full of time images. The magi wait chronological years upon years for the astronomical signs to announce that God has broken into their world, and when it finally happens they leave everything else behind to worship the King of the Jews. They travel for multiple chronological years until they find him in a house, and there they lay down priceless treasures of gold and frankincense and myrrh. The time that has passed upon their calendars becomes meaningless as they discover the one for whom they have been waiting, as they discover that the fullness of time has broken into their world.

The epiphany story is a reminder that within the course of our calendars and clocks, God breaks in. To the magi, God revealed hope for the world. To Mary and Joseph, God revealed safety for their family. To us, God reveals light in our darkness. God enters our calendar worlds and reminds us that the fullness of time is now.

Our chronos meets God's kairos when God-with-us is born among us and, like the magi, we recognize him and respond to him, bringing our gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Where do we look for him? we might ask. We follow the star to places where we would least expect to find him – stopped above stables and safe houses, shining upon shepherds' fields and the Spring Lake Restaurant, reflecting light on newborn kings and on patients in hospitals and nursing homes. If we are going to proclaim Christmas joy and believe that the hope of the world is here, we must realize the fullness of time right here in our own community, among the joys and the pain of our own neighbors.

We gather around the table today believing that the fullness of time is here, that God in Christ meets us and serves us food that allows us to see God in our own time, that acknowledges the hope of the world is here. God is with us. The invitation to the table is an invitation to leave our chronological calendars behind and receive the fullness of life and time that God has to offer. We come with our questions and our doubts and our beliefs and our hopes. We come hungry for one who can fill us and complete us and make us whole. We come bearing gifts while also receiving gifts of Christ's body and blood, of the fullness of time.

For you, O Lord, are worthy, we give you all the glory, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Amen.