

The First Sunday of Advent, Cycle C-- The Year of Luke

Jeremiah 33:14-16

I Thesalonians 3:12-4:2

Luke 21:25-36

“Be watchful and be ready, for you know not when the master of the house will come.”

Mindfulness: Life in the Present (un) Tense

Waiting.

Is there anybody who likes it?

Do we find ourselves saying: “Oh, great! I get to be behind all these wonderful folks here at the spacious and oh-so-architecturally interesting post office! Oh boy!”

Not likely.

Impatience is totally understandable, and hardly worth beating ourselves up over.

Heck, we probably indulged a dose of it this weekend, maybe even as we set about doing whatever was our spiritual practice.

There was some family member hogging bathroom mirror time, some indecisive driver ahead of us, maybe someone walking too slowly into the theatre or, God forbid, even the synagogue, mosque, temple or church we attended this weekend.

After all, we've got places to go, people to meet, things to do. Important things.

The character of Jesus that appears in this new liturgical year where the Christian churches unfold the Gospel of Luke, is also talking to us about places to go, people to meet, things to do. Yes, important things.

What is interesting about this first Gospel of this new “Cycle C” liturgical year (curiously enough, though it is the first reading of the year, it's not the “beginning of the Gospel according to Luke”—that, we'll read next Sunday) is that Luke relates a parable not of beginning or initiation, or even of overtly dynamic action, but of simple waiting and watching.

He offers six simple sentences about being prepared, ending with a stark and simple command: “Watch.”

It's like sitting in a theatre, having an announcer come on stage and say: “OK folks, glad you're here. Something is going to happen. Stay tuned.”

Exit the actor. No curtain rises. No stage lights illumine. Silence. Awkward restlessness in the audience. Mumbling. “When does this thing start?”

In Luke's recounting here of the parable of the traveler and the watchful gatekeeper who awaits his return, we are prone to think of the admonition: “Be watchful and be ready for you do not know the hour” as a caution to be on guard lest we slacken in our resolve and not be ready to face some final judgment of God, whether at our personal death, or at what Christians would call the Parousia, the Second coming of the Messiah.

But if we focus more on the powerful final word of Luke, “Watch,” I'm betting we'll get a far more immanent hit on what he was calling our attention to—presence, appreciation of the amazing grace of the now.

Perhaps Luke is telling us “Folks, what are you waiting for? The show has started. Aren't you paying attention? Are you waiting for some curtain to rise before the real action happens? This is the real. The real action happens before the curtain is even up—if you are awake enough to see the delightful play that the Creator has prepared for you!”

“Don’t you see the leading actress? The woman who took “your” parking place as you drove around the mall?

“The leading man, the guy who stopped you on the street to ask directions?”

“I am not behind the curtain, a veiled figment of the future. I was present to you in the groggy faces of your children this morning, in the frustrating person of your colleague at work last week, in the vulnerability of your isolated neighbor, and the fragileness of the homeless man you saw on the corner, this morning and all week long. Were you watchful enough to see me?”

Luke’s account invites us to what in the Tradition of Buddhism is called the practice of mindfulness. The ability to be fully and wholly present where we are, when we are, with whom we are.

Yes, there are the jokes “Grasshopper—you must become one with your mouse as you navigate the web, one with your racquet as you serve the fuzzy ball...” But beyond the humor of the advice, it is that of the Gospel as well.

“Don’t insult the Creator who loves you,” he says, “by seeing the car in front of you, or the child, the parent, the lover, the customer, the colleague, the competitor, the repairwoman, as an obstacle to your objective. That car, that person, is there with purpose, just as is your car for the person behind you. Watch! Take it in. Be present, alive, aware of the deep beauty of the moment.”

The phrase “There is no time like the present” might be spoken by Christ, as he understands the timelessness of the Creator, with a slightly different twist, with TWO verbs—“There is no time. Like the present. Like it a lot!”

In this Season of Advent, yes, we anticipate, we watch, we wait—but not for a reenactment of some event of 2,000 years ago. We watch that we might be ever more aware, ever more conscious, ever more mindful of the

constant presence of the timeless Divine in our lives. A presence not merely commemorated by the crèche of Christians, the menorah of Jews the, prayer wheels of Buddhists and Hindus, Qur’an and its sadaqah we will, but enfleshed for all time in what Christian and Muslim believers call the living, breathing Incarnate Christ, the divine whom we see in every person, and every experience, of our lives.

So yes, let’s take Luke’s words to heart as we begin this frenetic pre-Christmas season, keeping our focus, being ready for the surprising revelations of the Divine all along the way.

And reverencing the call to mindfulness—the deep and abiding presence to the blessing of every, and whatever, moment comes our way.

Something wonderful is going to happen. And it won’t involve the blowing of trumpets and the appearance of news cameras. It will be utterly simply. Utterly amazing.

Watch!

Monday Morning Meditation

Ever-present God, As I begin this day, help me to pay attention, to be truly present in every moment. Present to my loved ones, my friends, my colleagues. Those people closet to me and most likely to irritate me.

Invite me to see the You that is in them.

The divine within the mundane.

The timeless with in the temporal.

The grace amidst the chaos.

This is your intention for us. May it be mine today.

Evening Meditation

Ever-giving God, As I close my eyes tonight, may I hold the gentle recollection of all the graces that have fallen my way today.

Where I have watched, and my attentiveness has caused me pain, anxiety, a sense of helplessness, may this rest I now fall into give me strength to continue when I rise in the morning

Where I have not watched, may I be more attentive tomorrow.

I commend all those whom you have sent to me today to your care this night. I join them in the peace of your loving embrace.

Tuesday Morning Meditation

God of all time, this day is the most important day of my life, because it is the present you have given me.

Help me embrace it, to see the purpose of all that happens in it.

Let me enjoy it. Learn from it. Become with each activity closer to your loving intention for it.

Let me be watchfully aware of my actions, that I may be ready to do your loving will in every circumstance.

You have given me the freedom to reject your loving will. I thank you for that freedom, but it is my intention today to chose watchfulness over sleepwalking.

I so want to be ready for your cues today—I know the curtain is up, and I will watch for your cues. I will be ready!

Evening Meditation

Creator of the stars of night, as this day comes to a close, may I recall all those lights that shone for me today.

The beauty of your amazing creation.

The complexity of my body and it's workings.

The sustenance of the people who surround me.

I am aware that I became focussed on my tasks today—and I missed some of your cues. Forgive me, and let this evening's rest restore my openness to see you and your purpose for me when I wake in the morning.

Good night, dear God.

Wednesday Morning Meditation

Good Morning, You who are yet to come, and yet so very present here.

Where will I see you today?

Jeremiah reminded me this week that you are not the King of Might, coming in power, but the Lord of Justice, coming in peace.

Could it be, that today, at work, I'll see your invitation in an injustice that you will call me to address?

As I read the headlines, will I be moved to go beyond the “we have to do something about this” to “I am going to do something about this”?

What one wrong might I make right, today?

Where can I bring peace today?

Wednesday Evening Meditation

What a day! This paying attention to the headlines and seeing where you invite me through them is tough!

Why can't you just do your God thing and make it all right.

I know, you prefer the team approach, yadda yadda.

I was so resistant today—so many things compete for my energy.

The kids, my partner, the job—I've got my own issues to deal with.

Can't the injustices of the world be fixed by the people who are immediately affected by them? Why can't THEY take care of themselves?

I know—if I'm honest, it's my complacency and self absorption that have been a part of cause of what's wrong with this world.

Maybe that's what Jeremiah and Luke meant when they talked about the coming Kingdom—the Kingdom is bigger than me and my concerns—it's the Big Plan where everyone is in the preferred seating.

Let me think about this.

Good night—you who challenge me to be bigger than I think I am.

Thursday Morning Meditation

OK—I'm not over my self absorption, but I do get what you mean about the Kingdom is Coming.

Sure, you, Creator of all, could instantly effect this Kingdom, this world of justice that you had planned for us—but, in your Wisdom, you allow us to chose the life, the Kingdom in which we live personally and politically. You don't force us to be like you—you simply, lovingly invite us to the Kingdom you had in mind for us.

Help me answer “yes!” to your invitation to the Kingdom of Justice.

I want to do this.

I know you've given me the tools—I'm very lucky.

OK—I'm gonna do it.

Thursday Evening Meditation

It worked!

When I wasn't all worried and caught up in my stuff, I actually had a better day.

But you knew that.

Help me remember that—all the time.

I want to be in your Kingdom where all is as it ought to be.

I can make that happen

But first I need some sleep.

Friday Morning Meditation

Good morning, You who need no one, but invite me.

The briskness and darkness of this season are reminding me that this time is one of quiet calm, but the 20-shopping-days-'til-Christmas world is beckoning me to chaos and frenzy.

Help me resist, so that I actually enjoy this journey through the calm of Winter.

Help me be open to the grace of this day, so that I see every experience along the road not as an impediment to my goal, but as a delightful diversion sent to add joy to my day.

Yes, that would include the cat spraying on my briefcase.

Friday Evening Meditation

I'm liking this "it's not the destination, it's the journey" thing.

I had more fun today, and, in the end, got more done.

What was important got done.

The rest, that will get done tomorrow.

Especially if that dang cat gets off her spraying kick.

Good night, amazing Creator who has such a sense of humor.

Teach me something tonight as I sleep.

Saturday Morning Meditation

Yay!—sleeping in was so good. I should do this more often. OK, I will!

Lots to do today—but all in its time.

I haven't started Christmas shopping—Should I?

What am I saying when I buy someone a present? Hmmm—could I say that in a better way?

Would a gift of myself be better than a gift from The GAP?

Luke tells me the Day of Righteousness is coming—is something that has a price

tag really in the category of righteous?

I'm gonna look at my list and check it twice, to see if I can do something a little different this year.

Saturday Evening Meditation

I sensed your presence today.

It was especially obvious downtown where we were all packed in like sardines.

I actually saw some folks having a good time. But most folks seemed in a daze.

Which one was I? Well, I'm thinkin' I was in the "why is he so smiley" category.

And it seemed pretty contagious.

It really made me want to think more about doing something different for my loved ones this year.

What do I truly want for Christmas? It doesn't come in a box. You know what it is.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C, The Year of Luke

Baruch 5:1-9

Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6

"Every crooked way shall be made straight,
and all Creation will see the Salvation of God"

It ain't over 'til it's over

We've all seen those sidewalk preachers—usually bearded, often disheveled, raving, ranting, not at all unlike today's character, Jesus' cousin, John.

“The end is near! Repent before it's too late!”

Yeah, and Merry Christmas to you, too, sandwich-board man.

We don't particularly like to be told “Game Over.”

We don't do well with “Membership Expired” messages.

So, what do we do with the end game admonitions of John this Advent?

It would do John's passionate life an injustice to deny the “end is near” sense to his preaching. But it would be an equal mistreatment to see his focus as only on “the end.” What's really important is to consider WHAT is ending, and that that very ending is simply the starting point of what is the beginning of something brand new.

John's rantings are less a message of doom than it they are an invitation to “Something better is coming!”

It's no accident that Luke begins his report on the street corner preaching of Jesus' cousin John with a documentary-like “Here's who was in charge of the world when this all happened” opening statement.

More than an effort to bolster the authenticity of his reportage (after all, as a Greek, a well to do physician speaking to his Hellenistic audience, historicity will play a role in much of his accounting) the placement of John and Jesus in this exact political context was purposeful.

John and Jesus are the quintessential iconoclasts. The nut of their foundation-shaking advent message is: “Folks: What you see here in this human world is an illusion—the order established by the Romans and your own clergy is a sham. This earthly kingdom is fragile and flawed at its core. Look to the world of nature. There is a New Kingdom in the works—a

Kingdom where there is true justice, true peace where the disenfranchised are empowered, the weak are exalted to strength, and the voiceless given a voice. This is the Good News. Come, be a part of it.”

Baruch's prophetic words presage those of John as he describes Jerusalem, the New City, not as a collection of buildings, but as “The Peace of Justice.”

The readings remind us that yes, just as the year is coming to a close, the days are getting shorter, the sun's warmth is ebbing away, these events are not final, but the preparation for a New Season. There is no destination on this journey from season to season, there is only the movement toward something ever grander.

What is that to which we move toward? What draws our energies? What would we want a New Kingdom to look like?

Are we engaged enough in living to know that the static, the unmoving, the unchallenged life is the antithesis of growth?

Luke asks us, through the example of John the locust-eating resident weirdo: are our eyes open to see, our ears ready to hear, and our hearts willing to experience the grandeur and the excitement of a New Way of Looking at the World?

Himself a Greek and speaking to the non-Jewish world, Luke reminds us that, even before the recording of Christ's mission, there were, like John the Baptist, other men and women of conviction, non-Christian visionaries, who's teaching was worthy of being called Good. News.

Third Sunday of Advent—Year C--The Year of Luke

Zephaniah 3:14-18

Philippians 4: 4-7

Luke 3: 10-18



"This is the Good News—if you have two coats, give one to the person who has none."

If that's the Good News...

Luke's wild honey-eating character John is still at it, as he will be until he's arrested (and soon enough head-lobbed) by the makes-Hitler-look like-a-nice-guy, Herod .

The people who come to his pulpit by the Jordan and hear his message of conversion are full of questions, and, undoubtedly, surprised by his answer. They are, curiously enough, at once distressed and comforted by his words.

Luke refers to John's message as The Good News. In fact, Luke's reference to "The Gospel," the "Good News" is the earliest use of that signature

term. The usage doesn't appear in the accounts of other Gospel writers until they report cousin Jesus hitting the pavement and preaching from his own pulpit.

Wouldn't it be great to have sat in on a conversation at the Jordan?

"You've told us the end is coming—with such good news,(eye roll/hands lifted in quizzical gesture) you're wondering why we're not happy, already!? What do we do to avoid the wrath of God?' they ask.

"Do we give money to the temple" "No."

"Do we read more scripture?" "No"

"Do we fast and punish ourselves?" " No"

"Do we pray a lot" "Well, now you're getting closer."

"You people want to be a part of the New Kingdom, and not left behind in the dust of the old?"

Good—here's what you do: If you see someone without a coat, give them yours. If they have no food, share yours. That's it."

"But what about ceremonies and worship and praising God and following the Law?"

"That will come, if you get off your high horse and see yourself as connected to, not apart from or better than those around you in need."

"But it's so much easier to just follow the law and praise God."

"Easy, yes—what God needs, and wants, no."

When John baptized, it wasn't a little dab on the head with holy water.

Far from it.

He had his followers walk deep into the river, submersing themselves completely. The image was clear then, and only in churches where there is immersion do we get the full symbolism of the Baptism: As the water into which you plunge takes away your life and very breath, know that, as you arise from the water, you are a new person, unbounded by the chains of prejudice, of limitation, of smallness.

You are a New Creation, with only a world of possibilities before you.

Before the cleansing water, were you fearful of risk or transformation?

You are cleansed of that fear.

Before the cleansing water, were you harboring resentments and ill will?

You are washed of that draining force in your life.

Before the cleansing water, were you a slave to the past, a victim of your habits?

You are released from those bonds.

The Kingdom unfolding in this journeying season of Advent is challenging, indeed.

How much are we willing to follow the iconoclastic modeling of John and Jesus? Will we walk the road with them? Would we take the Baptism of John, casting off our entrapment in the status quo, and stepping bravely into a New Kingdom, with all the excitement and unknown that it brings?

As the Advent journey continues, winding its way to the light which is its beacon, we walk the road together, strengthened and supported

by a common vision of a Kingdom so much richer than the one we see only with our human eyes.

Fourth Sunday of Advent —Year C, The Year of Luke

Micah 5:2-5

Hebrews 10: 5-10

Luke 1: 39-45

“The religion of the Law is but a shadow of the good things to come. It has the



patterns of God, but not the realities.”

Let's get real, baby.

I think it's fair to say that we have an obsession with Reality TV.

Survivor, Temptation Island, COPS, Blind Date and its 10 iterations, Marry a Millionaire (or just use it as a springboard to the cover of Playboy). Like it (and admit to being caught up in it) or not, the airwaves are filled with the stuff.

The unsexy but informative McNeil Lehrer Report gets an unimpressive 4% market share. Jerry Springer gets a whopping 12.

What is up with that?

The readings today speak to the issue of reality: For Mary in Luke's Gospel, for the Israelites in Micah, and the Hebrews in Paul's letter, there is a question: What does real faithfulness, true devotion look like?

For Mary (who in this conversation with her also-expecting cousin, Elizabeth) the question is: What do I tell my family about the fact that I'm 5 months pregnant and 3 months married?

Elizabeth, literally old enough to be Mary's mother, makes the task easy—she embraces Mary, and declares: “You are most blessed among women. You have believed in the promise of God”

Not quite the “You go, girl” you might hear today, but so richly affirming of Mary's reality. And what is that reality? Elizabeth senses that Mary is to be the vehicle through which the New Kingdom is to be brought to the human experience. Mary's reality is that. If she is attentive and responsive to the will of God, then all, even an unexpected pregnancy, will be well.

Paul's letter to the Philippians echoes the words of Micah (“It is not sacrifice and oblation that I desire”) and follows the theme of Mary's seeking to do God's will by fleshing out the details of what that will is, and what it is not.

Mary and Paul respond to the question: What is real for me—what is the will of God? The answer resonates for each of them in the words of Micah: “It is not the offering of oblations that I seek, nor the sacrifice of your finest cattle. It is not the observance of all the details of the law alone. You know what Yahweh would demand of you: Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God”

Paul's letter to James sums it up: “What is true religion? It is to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”

Perhaps that definition of “real religion” is bad news for us, Why couldn't “The Real Religion Show” focus on people bowed in prayer, singing songs of praise and thumping on a bible or pamphletting Planned Parenthood—something easier than comforting the sorrowful, feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, picketing the White House.

In this Advent we are called to open to the journey not of ease, but of challenge. Building a New Kingdom, unlike what we've known in the past, is not an easy task Thank heaven for the certainty of the light we approach even as these days grow colder. We see the brilliance ahead, and it fuels us when the path is dim, and the weather, chilling.

We walk toward the dawn of Christmas, knowing that the Christ whom we celebrate is not a distant historical figment, but a fellow traveler on this mysteriously wonderful human journey. A journey that begins with the simple and single step of saying “I want to go where life is real.”

Christmas Day, Cycle C—The Year of Luke

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Titus 3: 4-7

Luke 2:15-20

The child shall be called

“Emmanuel—God With Us”

And a virgin shall bear a child

Could the scene be more simple?

A young mother, a glowing father.

A choir of angels. A chorus of shepherds.

And let's not forget the sheep, oxen and donkeys.

Considering the neighborhood, probably no pigs--but definitely birds. Lots of birds.

And, in that manger, the Mystery of the Universe.

How could this little Jewish boy be the Messiah?

Weren't his parents nobodies from the backwaters of Galilee?

Would the Messiah be born in a stable?

Nothing made sense.

Nonsense, indeed—unless seen with the kind of eye that Isaiah had.

It would take a poet to open a rationally-focused (and proud of it) species like ours to remember that, beyond the world of logic, beyond the world of evidence and fact, there is the world of Truth. Rabbinic wisdom puts it so clearly: “The Truth is too important to be limited to the facts.

Isaiah was insightful enough to know that the Messiah to come would not be about maintaining the status quo. If Israel were to be redeemed, it would have to be on new terms, God's terms, not the proven-to-fail, here today, gone tomorrow terms of military and political might.

To an oppressed people who have known only subjugation by the sword, such a message was not the best of news.

But Isaiah never gave up—his prophecies of the savior are filled with descriptions that fly in the face of logic. The Redeemer will come as a humble child. Who will grow up in ignominy. And die an early death at the hands of the people he is sent to free. Some Savior!

And his vision of the New Jerusalem, his picture of the reign of God—equally as difficult to swallow.

Lions will rest with lambs, and leopards will play with calves. Children shall dance in the viper's den. All nations shall be at peace. There will be no hunger. Death shall not be a fear.

And to make this happen, a virgin will conceive, and bear a child.

Perhaps that is the clincher—how on earth can that happen!!

Maybe that is the answer—on earth, alone, it cannot. But, if we could expand our understanding of the Creator's intention that there never would be what we humans have assigned as an inherent gulf between what is of Earth and what is of Heaven, virgin births and lion-friendly lambs might be the order of the day.

The very illogic and idiosyncrasy of Jesus' birth is essential to its power.

What good would it be for a Messiah whose mission is to transform the face of the earth, to reorient the way a people perceive their relationship with the Eternal, to arrive and live by the conventional assumptions of the time?

Could a message of “God's people are one—there is no hierarchy, no status structure in the Kingdom of God” be conveyed by a Messiah who lived a life of luxury and power?

Could the message that the Creator so loved the world that he would give up to it his very Son, be conveyed if this very gift were immune from all the experiences that mark the complex and often subtle beauty of the Human Condition?

It is precisely in the frailty and simplicity of this Christmas scene that we get a hint of the irony and counter-intuitive nature of Christ's presence on this fragile planet.

I was not always a fan of the virgin birth—thinking it a slap in the face of human sexuality, a throwback to the medieval view that the human conception is at best a reluctant concession offered by the Church to us weak humans.

Understanding it in the terms of Isaiah, there is such potential beauty in the illogic of a virgin birth.

It invites us to say “YES—there is a world of possibilities beyond the limitations of our present knowledge, our present experience.”

Yes, there is a world bigger than our personal, or societal or continental view. It is a world of grandeur imagined and presented to us by poets and artists. Celebrated in literature. Drawn on cave walls and stretched canvases. Danced on stage and around campfires.

And brought into tangible, palpable human experience by the unexpected Messiah, the vulnerable infant Jesus, son of the Mary and Joseph, carpenter of Nazareth.

Merry Christmas, and blessed, to you and all you touch this day.

Feast of the Holy Family Cycle C—The Year of Luke

Sirach 3: 2-17

Colossians 3: 12-21

Luke 2:41-52

And the child grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and men.

The Ever-elusive Functional Family

Not exactly a Kodak moment in Luke's recounting here, with Jesus, age 12, ditching his parents at the enormous Passover gathering at the Temple of Jerusalem, surfacing three days later with only the explanation of: “Hey, I had things to do.”

We can imagine the scenario: “Mary, is Jesus with you and your family?”

“No, Joseph, I thought he was with yours!”

“Great—why would you think he's with us—he was just with you the other day!”

“So, this is MY fault?! I can't turn my back for one minute without things falling apart! Why can't you take more responsibility for things! Why is it always MY job to take care of him!”

“Because it IS your job! Who puts the bread on the table, huh? Who has to deal with Ibrahim the shopkeeper's complaints that the tables I make for him are arriving too late and his customers are complaining, huh!!”

None of the Gospel writers tell us much about the “growing up” years of Jesus, but fantasy scenarios aside, we do get an indication from Luke and his fellow writers that there was nothing exceptional about the grade school years.

It was at 12, hormones and intergalactic forces in full swing, that the family, and indeed the world at large, was to begin to see just what Jesus was made of.

Perhaps even that epiphany is not exceptional in itself—that glorious and tumultuous period of movement into teenage years is as much a part of the third millennium family experience as it was the reality of Joseph and Mary.

What happened that spring weekend 3,000 years ago?

When the parents found Jesus, he was sitting in the midst of the Hebrew doctors and teachers of the Talmud. He was sitting, clearly a posture of learning and submission, but “they were amazed at his intelligence and replies.”

No wisenheimer kid here, just a very well read, inquisitive, open-minded boy who was hungry for knowledge.

At first reading, Jesus’ “Didn’t you know I would be about my Father’s business?” might seem an impertinent response to his parent’s heartfelt “Where have you been! We’ve been worried sick about you!”

But, spinning it slightly, it holds a softer retort: “Mom and Dad, you know how you raised me, you know how you’ve taught me to love the scriptures. You know how my spiritual yearnings compel me and how anxious I am to learn more—didn’t it make sense to you, now that I’m older, that I’d be here at the Temple drinking in every bit of knowledge I could? This is the way you raised me—and I’m glad for it! And you are right—I could have called you from my cell phone. Sorry.”

Paul’s letter to the Church at Colossus exhorts a family environment which we can imagine was the case for Jesus’ family. “As God loves you, so should you be clothed in sincere compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, even as a quarrel begins.”

Is this a pie-in-the sky, unreal expectation of family life? As a descriptor of what is the typical experience, it may be inaccurate, but as an encouragement of what to strive for, I’m thinking it would be hard to find a family psychologist would say it wasn’t a worthy goal to work toward.

This raises the question—what do we do with worthy goals? Do we honor them in theory, and pedestal them, categorizing them as theoretically good, but practically unattainable?

That does let us off pretty easily—we can get point for “at least knowing

what was right” while at the same time, getting excused from doing what is right, because the ideal we’ve set is “just too high and unrealistic.”

The lessons of this Christmas Season remind us that our view of what is realistic might be so constricting that we never do stretch beyond the comfort of our verifiable logic and the limits of our experience.

This week, The Holy Family, Paul, Sirach each call us to be more imaginative in our picture of what can be. In this rich Christmas Season, we are challenged, from the infant’s birth on through the Baptism of the fully-matured Christ, to ask: “Do I want to live in the small world where I am in charge, in control, in certainty, in habit, in the conviction that what I see and hear is reality, and there is nothing beyond that? Or do I want to live in a big world where my heart and soul open to an imagination beyond the confines of my logic and limited personal experience?”

The family is indeed the garden in which such imagination can be cultivated. What a responsibility it is for us to create environments in our family, our circle of friends, our colleagues, our communities, where imagination is as much a part of the equation as fact.

Indeed, how wonderful it is when we have those little or large epiphanies where we smile and say—“Wow, I never would have thought that could happen.”

If there is a crisis of faith in the world, it has little to do with whether too few people are saying “Jesus (or Allah or Buddha or Bagwan Rashneesh, or whomever) is my personal savior.”

The crisis is that we don’t believe that our imaginings of a world better than what we have, a world beyond the logic of historical repetition, is actually attainable.

Perhaps that faith is what Jesus had when he is described as “growing in

wisdom, stature and favor among God and men.”

Feast of the Epiphany Cycle C—The Year of Luke

Isaiah 60: 1-6/20

Ephesians 3: 2-6

Matthew 2:1-12



THE PEOPLE WHO
WALKED IN DARKNESS
HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT

And the sight of the star filled them with delight.

Star quality

The story of the Magi didn't make it into Luke's Gospel, so today's reading comes from Matthew—who, curiously enough, barely mentions the birth of Jesus, but finds it important to report on the visitation of the Wise Men from the East.

What's the deal with the Magi? Who were they? Why are they important?

Historians and scholars disagree on exactly who the visitors were, but there is consistency in the interpretation of what they symbolize.

Tradition holds that the travelers are from the East—meaning, literally, east of the Middle East. This was to the people of the time an exotic place, a place of mystery, where the cultures and religions that guided those cultures were completely distinct from the Hebrew culture and religion.

These Kings of the Orient, which, we can surmise, were not monotheists, but most probably Hindu, Buddhist or Zoroastrian, and yet, "invited" to experience and pay homage to the Messiah of the Jewish people.

This would be a shock to the devout Hebrew, who, for nearly a millennium, was taught that there was a special relationship between Israel and God, a unique bond which was not to be shared with any other nation. When the Messiah came, it would be to vanquish other nations and submit them to the Law of Moses.

The Gospel's insinuation that the Messiah would be revealed to all nations, not just the nation of Israel, would be more than a shock—it would be an insult to the unique specialness of the bond of Yahweh and the Jewish people.

The Gospels, then, get off to a contentious start, virtually immediately cautioning the readers of the time that the Messiah is not a gift to a "Special People" alone, but a grace to the Universe at large.