

Isaiah 43:1-3

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel; your Savior.

Psalm 23 – read in unison

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Romans 14:7-8

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

A Celebration of Grace in the Life of Noupay Diduangleuth

January 5, 2019 – Advent

Interment at Pleasant Valley Cemetery

Grace and peace to you from God, the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The story of Mary and Martha. Most of us who knew Noupay, even in passing, would have immediately identified her with Mary, the sister who sits quietly at Jesus' feet, soaking up every moment of his presence, each word, each movement, captured and kept in a special place in her heart.

But Noupay was also Martha – working behind the scenes to build a family – to build a church – to support her husband, Ben and her children and grandchildren, and to take pride in all of it. She was strong and shrewd in a way, willingly taking on the role of Matriarch of the Family, and First Lady of the Lao Mission here at Advent.

But when I think of Noupay, the first thing I think of is egg rolls. Have I mentioned her egg rolls yet? I am willing to bet that anyone in this room who was blessed to have had her egg rolls, knows of what I speak when I say, they were a taste of heaven. Once I tasted hers, well – let's just say that Pastor Ben gave the ladies of Advent a recipe some years ago which we each tried to achieve over the years. Not

one of us even attempted a second batch. But Noupay brought egg rolls to the church for me, every Christmas Eve (and one of her last concerns...when she could barely lift her own head was that she had to get up to make egg rolls for Pastor Susan this year.

Those egg rolls were a symbol of God's kingdom: little bits of different meats and vegetables, eggs, noodles, oils and spices – a bit of this, a bit of that, all wrapped together in a loving embrace with an expert hand -- and warmed to a golden brown.

While I was failing at learning “egg roll,” she was learning a lot of English in the last 20 years...to the point where we were able to communicate much better, and I got to know a little more of her. That was all Noupay – her hard work and dedication to the task, whether the other party (that would be me) was doing the same work on the task or not.

The Mary part of her – the part that watched, and learned, and grabbed hold of - didn't care what the Martha part wanted her to be doing, (she had a little bit of a stubborn streak...) as long as she accomplished what she'd set out to do, forming relationships however she could, grasping my hands each week and smiling that beautiful and loving smile.

In a later story about Mary and Martha, Jesus came to mourn his friend, their brother Lazarus. Both the sisters approach Jesus with the same comment, “*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!*” To which Jesus will reply that it is not his physical presence that brings new life – but believing in his essence, his spirit – which holds the power of love and new creation.

“*I am the Resurrection and the Life*” Jesus said, and Noupay simply accepted that as easily as her breath. Now Noupay knows that resurrected life first hand. Now she walks hand in hand with Jesus and sits at his feet to hear his stories. Resurrected.

But when the challenges that she faced in life – and there were many – became overwhelming, and when her memories were mostly lost, and we all started participating in the long goodbye each time we were with her, “dear sweet Noupay” had hope. And love. And faith. It seemed always to be all around her - gently and sweetly as her itinerary got shorter and shorter and her destination got closer and closer.

For Noupay, this was the great truth evident in her life: God loved her, and so everything else was about being that godly presence, which she learned how to do in spite of language. She knew, it was all about hospitality.

Noupay reached across the barriers of culture, ethnicity, and unknown language with a soft smile, a gentle giggle, and a platter of those amazing Laotian egg rolls. Just as God reached out of divinity to cross into the experience of humanity – with loving words and actions, and the bread and wine of his own body and blood...A new covenant; a new understanding of living among God's people – serving others with all the gifts God has bestowed.

Thank you, Noupay, for sweetness and lovingkindness. Thank you for loving flowers and children and your family and your home. Thank you for blessing us with your gentle yet strong presence. And thank you for showing us so well how to love God, and your neighbor as yourself. *Rejoice this day in the goodness of the Lord*, until we meet again...Resurrected. Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Lutheran Church
Olathe, KS

“Trusting God’s Star”
The Day of Epiphany – January 6, 2019 – Matthew 2:1-12/C

INTRO: There is a strange juxtaposition we stand in today.

Even as the semi-liturgical “12 Days of Christmas” ends Sat. night,
and we’ll make sure our trees/decorations are packed and put away -

We will make the arrival of The Wise Ones from the East.

As many beautiful new things happen in Scripture –
it happened at night - under cover of darkness –
the time between sundown and sunrise.

After all their travel and some travail, the Wise Ones came
to Bethlehem to see this New Thing – a child –

but if we have adhered to 12th Night Christmas cleansing – there is no manger scene still waiting for
them to inhabit.

So let’s just leave the story open one more day: The Day of Epiphany and for the next 8 weeks we can
settle in to hear the stories
of how God was revealed in the man, Jesus.

I: What is it about the stillness, the darkness, that God chooses

as the best time for new things: Creation itself - the Incarnation of God in flesh - the Resurrection
from the dead.

God just loves to work in the atmosphere most of us avoid.

We are in the last few days of Christmas, of Mary’s story in Luke 2. Moving into Epiphany Season -> rooted in
Matthew, Joseph’s story.

Uniquely **Luke?** Shepherds, angels; themes: fulfill ss/inclusive

Matt? Dreams, Herod, Wise 1s. themes: political/power/status

Lots of legends around these visitors from the East: 3? Kings? Names? especially telling for Matthew’s
audience - they are depicted even today with three separate ethnicities - such that all known continents:
Africa, Asia and Europe - came to pay homage to the Christ child. Not just Jews. But the whole world.

II: In our Wed. group Questioning Gospels, we've seen new stuff:

In this story, it is the Star. I have been thinking about that Star alot.

Searching scientific stuff to explain this star over Bethlehem

stars and comets, supernovae and planetary convergences. Suffice it to say, nobody really knows how a star rises/appears – then travels slowly enough across the sky that a camel caravan can *follow* for a journey that may have lasted about two years - and then recalculates like a modern GPS when the Wise Ones unwisely *assume* their destination is the great city of Jerusalem. (Where else to find a child who is born King, but in the King's palace?) And when they realize their error, the star reappears and leads them south to Bethlehem, where (according to a beloved hymn)

it stopped and stayed, right over the place where Jesus lay.

The star rose... it moved to a destination, and then it STOPPED.

How do we explain that? I'd say it was a "cosmic event." Others might explain it as an intervention by God –

Or what if the idea of Emmanuel, God with us, is playing out through the activity of God coming down among us in Christmas story? Joseph hears God in dreams; Mary meets an archangel, Gabriel

Shepherds receive a birth announcement from heavenly hosts;

Wise Ones get a star guide to destination. Could God *be* more clear?

III: My lingering question is really one about the Bible and us.

Engaging Scripture means putting yourself into the story and developing a relationship with the characters that appear

then finding a way to explore their human experience.

Can we feel the embrace of a community the way they felt the support of their tribe? Do we make decisions as they did, based on status, power, safety that princes of the world provide

or do we follow God's directions regardless of risk?

Can we learn from these stories the way we learn from our own lives?

CONC: I mean, think about your situation 2 years ago.

Would you have followed a star God set before you without knowing where it would lead? Would you have stayed faithful to that journey even through unexpected turns? Loss of loved ones? Birth of a child? A serious diagnosis? Empty nest, promotion, retirement, move? What if you ended up in Jerusalem, *which seemed the most likely place to find what you were looking for,*

when you should have kept your eyes on Bethlehem

What God was doing that you could not know?

Why did those Wise Ones follow? And why would you?

Perhaps the great author C.S. Lewis has the best advice:

"Look for Christ and you will find him. And with him, everything else."

(Tom Long) There is an unexpectedly amusing moment in Raymond Brown's masterly commentary on the New Testament Christmas texts, *The Birth of the Messiah*. Brown observes how the piety of the church has worked overtime on this wise men story. In Christians' imagination, the magi have morphed into kings, and Christians have decided there were three of them. We have even given them different colors, ethnicities, and names. Brown cites a fanciful entry in an ancient saints' calendar in which the three wise men, having served as tireless champions of the gospel and now centenarians, meet for one last Christmas reunion in Armenia. After celebrating the Mass of the Nativity, the three magi die within days of one another.

One would expect Brown, the exacting exegete, to come down with a sledgehammer on such embellishments. Instead, he wryly observes that all this coloring in of the story with the crayons of imagination and piety is pretty much exactly what Matthew hoped would happen. The exotic details invite us to imagine the unimaginable: that the God of Israel has in generosity turned the face of mercy toward all nations, and that magi from the East and people from Philadelphia or Georgia can stream to Mount Zion and learn God's ways.

In other words, the story of the magi cracks open the story of “Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” to let us see that there is a place there for those who are near and even for those who come from afar. “Naive?” asks Brown. “Yes, but a valid hermeneutic instinct nevertheless.”

No wonder, then, that Herod and all of Jerusalem shake like leaves in the wind when the wise men show up and ask about the king of the Jews. The question implies a wider and more gracious kingdom in play than the shriveled precinct they assume they control. What’s more, it hints that the little tin-pot Herod has no control over access. On Christmas Eve, children all over put on bathrobes and Burger King crowns and make their way down the church aisle to Bethlehem, imagining themselves to be a part of the great story of Jesus Christ. They’re onto something.

Resources: David Keck, *Sunday’s Coming/Christian Century*; Raymond Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*; Thomas Long, *Christian Century* for 1.4.14