



## *“Learning to Worship”*

Sermons at Central Park United Methodist Church

The Rev. Mary A. Kelly

8 January 2017; based on Matthew 2:1-12

*I spent a good deal of time “putting away Christmas” this past week:* packing up nativity sets, storing wreaths, carefully wrapping treasured ornaments in tissue paper where they'll nestle safely for the coming year. Taking down the tree and its affiliated decorations isn't nearly as exciting a venture as putting them up! The anticipation of celebration is long gone, out the door along with the last guest. We've eaten nearly everything- and too much, if you want to know the truth- so that we can spend the next several weeks concentrating all our efforts on getting our jeans to fit us comfortably again!

The stores are displaying their Valentine's Day wares, and you can even find bags of Easter candy prepped and ready for sale, just beyond the Christmas clearance racks- 75% off all of the things you still don't need at a terrific price. Truth be told, “putting away Christmas” can sometimes feel like a dismal task, with little to look

forward to but another long, cold Buffalo winter. Into this breach of disordered seasonal reckoning comes Theologian, author, and Civil Rights activist Howard Thurman, who long ago penned a notable antidote to our cultural Christmas hangover:

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
...To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among brothers,  
To make music in the heart.

*The season of Epiphany presents us with the awesome opportunity to remain starstruck* by the events of Christmastide by reflecting on the ways in which God's glory was made manifest in the person of Jesus the Christ. Epiphany means "manifestation," or "revelation;" and for us that means looking at the person of Jesus as God's gift of Light and Life to a broken world. Like Christmas, Epiphany is a season in the life cycle of the Church, marking the days between this Sunday and the start of Lent (March 1, 2017, Ash Wednesday).

*Epiphany is a time of discovery*, a time in which we re-examine the activities of Jesus and re-imagine the ways in which God is still working through us in the world today; after all, the Christ child did not remain in the lowly manger, but grew and taught and healed and loved, becoming once and for all the fullest expression of "God with us." His was and is a life worthy of our praise, our devotion, and our ongoing worship. Worship, I should

note, is not just something we do for an hour and a half on a Sunday morning; rather, it is a way of life.

*True worship requires our constant devotion* and continual reverence of God in Christ; an understanding that our lives are lived out in service to God. What we do and who we are reflect God's abiding presence within us; therefore we ought to say "To God be the Glory" when our accomplishments are lauded, or when our cups brim over with earthly rewards. Worship of God is a universal act as well, from which no one is immune or excluded, as seen in the Gospel stories of that first Christmas. The worship of God belongs to Angels and Kings, shepherds and peasants and even their livestock: all Creation on bended knee, praising God.

*The kings of this earth are not exempt from worshiping God*, though some of them mistakenly think otherwise. The Magi in today's story offer a stark contrast to the murderous Herod, who thought himself to be a god but was instead duped by three foreigners who wisely recognized the coming of The Christ to earth. This is God's way: "He puts forth his arm in strength and scatters the proud-hearted. He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly." (Luke 1:51-52) Who is more lowly than a poor hapless babe whose parents have no place to lay their heads? And yet God chose to dwell among the poor, the despised, and the outcast. How is it that we have not yet fully understood this paradox?

*The Magi were wise because they understood* that God was revealing God's self in the person of a baby born in the meanest of circumstances; because they believed despite all evidence to the contrary that God was about to do something amazing in the world! This is the spirit of Epiphany: True Worship in the midst of

chaos and calamity; resistance in the face of evil and wrong-doing; the ability of Almighty God to break into human history with goodness and all-encompassing love in spite of our propensity for death and destruction. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

*At Christmas, we celebrate that God’s Light has indeed come into the world.*

At Epiphany, let us rediscover what it means to embrace that Light that shines on in our darkness (John 1:5); at Epiphany, let us worship the Father in spirit and truth, (John 4:23) allowing the Light of Christ to shine through us in all ways. At Epiphany, let us learn to “Come and worship; Come and worship; Worship Christ, the newborn King.”

Rev. Mary A. Kelly

