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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

Christmas 1/Epiphany

January 1, 2023

Isaiah 52:7-10; Ps. 72:1-7, 10-14; Eph. 3:1-12; Matt. 2:1-12

I'm going to start the sermon today with a pop quiz – are you ready? Here's the question: what were the wise men, the wise ones, known for? A just a reminder – this is the only place in the Bible we hear about them..... Here are some follow up questions:

-How many wise men were there? Not 3; we think there were three because of the three gifts they brought.

-When did they come? Could have been months or even years later if they were coming from Persia on foot.

-Were they kings (because that's what we sing about, right)? Likely Zoroastrian priests who read the stars.

The wise men were known for gifts they brought, they were known for how they honored and cared for Jesus and his family. They saw the star over Bethlehem and knew it signified the birth of a king. That's obviously why King Herod felt threatened when he heard about Jesus' birth from the wise men. And even though how we represent the wise men in our nativity scenes probably isn't very exactly historically accurate, we know them because they brought gifts to Jesus when he was born.

(As the children pointed out), gold, frankincense and myrrh might not be the most appropriate gifts for a baby, but it's clear that these gifts might not only have been for the baby Jesus, they might have been for his whole family:

Perhaps the gold financed their refuge to Egypt after King Herod in the next verses following this gospel text threatened to search for Jesus and destroy him.

Perhaps the frankincense, which was known for having anti-anxiety and anti-depression properties, was meant for Joseph to calm him after he was warned in a dream to flee with his family to Egypt.

Perhaps the myrrh, which was used by women in biblical times to enhance blood clotting and reduce post-partum bleeding, was a gift for Mary.

The point is, why we know the wise men is because of the gifts they brought. They were known for responding with generosity to the birth of Jesus and for caring for his family.

Now the day we traditionally celebrate the wise men is on Epiphany, which is always January 6, the 12th day of Christmas. But as Americans we now have another association with the date January 6th, don't we? There were many people on January 6th two years ago at our nation's Capitol who are now known not for bringing gifts to honor the birth of Jesus, but rather for things like:

Assaulting, resisting, or impeding officers; civil disorder; destruction of government property; entering and remaining in a restricted building or grounds; disorderly and disruptive conduct; engaging in physical violence in Capitol grounds, and the list goes on and on and on.

That's what at least 964 people who have been arrested and charged so far are known for. Which perhaps begs a question for the rest of us:

What are we known for? Or what is it that you *want* to be known for? Because it's clear from the examples both of the wise men and those at the nation's capital on January 6th, that what you do, how you respond, has everything to do with what you are known for.

It's quite appropriate that today, New Year's Day, we reflect and make commitments on how we want to be known in the coming year. And so maybe that's why we need to think about our feet. Perhaps that sounds a little strange, but what we heard today from Isaiah tells us something about our feet:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Now I don't think my feet are beautiful; maybe you don't think your feet are beautiful either. But according to scripture, your feet are beautiful when they announce peace, when they bring good news, when they announce

salvation, when they say to Zion—to Jerusalem—and to the world, “Your God reigns.”

When you think about what you want to be known for, you need to think about your feet. Because people out there are watching your feet. They are watching where your Christian feet go. They are watching where you lead and where you allow yourself to be led. They are watching what you take a stand for and what you walk away from.

If you want to be known as a follower of Jesus Christ, then you have to pay attention to your feet and in whose footsteps you walk.

Earlier in worship today, this is what we prayed in the Prayer of the Day:

God, accept our lives as the treasure we offer in your praise and for your service. Our lives are our treasure, and where we bring that treasure, where we place it, what we do with it, will determine, according to Isaiah, the beauty of our feet and whether it praises and serves God.

That means that spending your time, your money, and your heart where peace is fostered.

That means that walking toward the hurting and away from those who hurt.

That means taking a stand for those who are marginalized, those who are discriminated against, those who are bowed down.

To follow in Jesus’ footsteps means that you foster the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And, to be honest, where those footsteps lead won’t always be popular.

But by paying attention to where your feet go, where you lead and where you are led, what you take a stand for and what you walk away from, you will be known, like the wise ones, for sharing your gifts with Jesus.

So this new year, may you be known for your beautiful feet. Amen.

(Even though it’s not exactly historically accurate, let’s sing We Three Kings)