

“Support of the Village”
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Isaiah 60.1-6
Matthew 2.1-12
January 8, 2023

This week I had the privilege of going with five college students to the Montreat College Conference in North Carolina. It is a time when they invite ministers and speakers to explore a common faith theme, and students can grow in their faith, ask questions about their vocation, and have time of fellowship with other students.

The theme this year was "Keep Going." I'm going to try not to talk about the conference too much because later this month the students will lead you in worship and I don't want to give too much away. But in this conference we had a dynamic preacher, Rev. Phanta Lansden. She opened by giving us an idea of who was in her village, encouraging us to think about who might be in our own villages. These are people that support us and we support. For example, I would include my family and friends, my colleagues in ministry, therapists and doctors that support my family.

Now, this doesn't include everyone, but as we talked we realized we had different villages that sometimes overlap, but perhaps we have different roles and functions in them. For example, I also include you in my village, and I include students in that village, and my kids' friends in that village. I play a different role of support to my family than I do to you, but you all are in my village.

Rev. Phanta took this from the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. And I think we know that the village doesn't go away, because we still need that village into adulthood. So, I wonder who is in your village? I wonder who supports you? Do you have multiple villages?

There was a village that looked after Mary and Joseph after Jesus was born. I have always imagined Mary being absolutely exhausted after giving birth in this cave, and then people just keep showing up to worship her child. But maybe that reflects my own exhausted parenting state rather than hers. Perhaps she welcomed all this help and attention from these people who came to recognize what she already knew - that this child was special, this child was the Messiah, this child was God-with-us.

The list of people included shepherds and magi, and maybe others who passed by and were never mentioned in scripture. It might have included the person who took care of the animals in the cave they were inhabiting. Perhaps a small child playing nearby paused long enough to look upon the baby with awe. I wonder if Elizabeth and Zechariah made the trip with their own wee one in tow.

Our scripture today is an Epiphany scripture that focuses on the magi. Epiphany is celebrated January 6 but because I love Epiphany so much I usually pushback Baptism of Jesus Sunday so we don't miss this amazing celebration.

Time has passed since the birth of Christ. The Christ child is almost 2 years old, toddling around, probably exploring everything and keeping Mary on her feet. This passage takes place before what we read last week, when Joseph receives a dream from an angel saying they must flee to Egypt.

This story is not to be taken literally, as we have often imagined three wise men following a star. It might have been a group of people, it might have been women, they might have stopped to ask directions rather than following a star. Though, I don't think it would be too

far out of the way to say the star was possible just because in those times much was followed by the placement of stars in the sky.

So the magi follow the star and run into Herod. This is a king who was known for being insecure and jealous. He was not a good leader. He hears that the magi are looking for a child king, and internally Herod becomes very anxious but externally he calmly tells the magi to find this "king" and report back to him.

The magi continue and follow the star to Jesus, where they offer gifts that represent royalty. These magi are part of the village that bring support to the holy family. They encourage Mary in her sleepless nights, they lift up Joseph who might still be in shock, they worship Jesus, who has much ahead of him.

Perhaps the most important thing the magi do to support the holy family is to not return to Herod. After a warning from the angels not to return, in an act of defiance, they turn away. They do not indulge Herod's toxic ways.

After Herod realizes he has been had we read the scripture from last week where he orders all children under 2 to be murdered. What a horrific concept. What a terrible edict to send out. But maybe it isn't so difficult to wrap our heads around in 2023 as we continue to hope and pray that school shootings will cease. Perhaps the lack of gun policies in our country sentences youth to the same fate as the children of Herod's time. Perhaps we are not as far away from this scene as we wish.

It takes a village. It took a village to protect this divine child. It takes a village to protect our lovely children. It takes a village to make change, support each other, and make it through.

My favorite poet that I have mentioned too many times in sermons is Ross Gay. In his most recent book that I proudly finished in less than a year, talks about teaching and rather than treating students as "units," we think of it as a community of learning. He says, "mutual supported lostness, also known as wonder and care."¹ I like this image of a village being one of mutual supported lostness. It is a reminder that we don't have all the right answers, that we go through this together sharing ideas and resources, and most of all, it is one that approaches the world with wonder.

This is the piece I want us to focus on. Approach with wonder. I think of wonder in two ways - first is one of awe. We can show a healthy respect and amazement. I also think of wonder as questioning in a gentle way - of imagining and letting our creativity run rampant.

I think this is the way we change the world, the church, and ourselves - with wonder. The beautiful thing about wonder is it creates space for imagination. It doesn't assume the answers. Like the image of God dwelling with us, wonder invites us to put up a tent, dwell in the unknown, and dream of the possibilities. It pushes away the critic, it blocks out that which says, "we can't do it that way." It allows space for the opportunities and the marginalized voices to sit and have a cup of tea and discuss what could be.

We sing about the star of wonder, in which the magi were not held by "this is impossible" but leaned into the unknown. They embraced the wonder. They embraced possibility.

Wonder defies. Last week in our communion liturgy we talked about gathering as an act of defiance. Gathering is scary to those in empire, because within gatherings people relate, they talk, they wonder, they dream, and eventually realize that it doesn't have to be that way.

So, my wish for you all this year - for all of us, is a year of wonder and dreaming.

What are you in awe of?

¹ Ross Gay, *Inciting Joy*. (New York: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2022), 148.

What do you wonder about the church?

What dreams do you have?

May we mutually wonder together in defiance of the empire and in solidarity of the village of Christ. Amen.