

Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2019

Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift & Rev. Bob Brown

"An Interview With Bob, the Magus"

THE INTRODUCTION TO THE READING

We are used to hearing passages from the Prophet Isaiah during the Advent/Christmas season. The gospel writers often quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures, making connections to the story of the birth and ministry of Jesus. During the times of Isaiah, the Jews were in exile in Babylon and particularly longed for God's salvation in the promise of an earthly king – the Messiah. Matthew and Luke understood Jesus to be that "Christ" – "the anointed ruler."

Matthew doesn't always use direct quotes in his storytelling, but the early listeners would have noticed implied connections between the visiting magi and those who bow before the God of Israel in Psalm 72, from which we have derived this morning's call to worship. When they heard of the foreign dignitaries that come with gifts of gold and frankincense, and considered the star that led them to Bethlehem, they would have also linked the gospel to Isaiah 60.

Let's listen for the connections:

THE READING Luke 1:39-45

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;

but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;

your heart shall thrill and rejoice,*
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
6 A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

EPIPHANY SUNDAY Sermon/Interview
Final Outline
January 6, 2019

Tussie Williams will read the introduction to and the first scripture reading - Isaiah 60:1-6, and then she and Jean will leave the chancel, as Carrie invites the children to come forward and gather near the stools on the Parish Hall side of the sanctuary.

JEAN (to the children): Hi. Happy Epiphany! Do you remember the part of the Christmas story where the wise men came to visit Jesus? This Sunday, January 6, marks their visit. We remember it and seek to learn from it. Who among you played the magi in the pageant this year?

Let's listen to the second scripture reading of the morning. It is the last part of their visit to Jesus. (Jean reads it – Matthew 2:10-11.)

And guess what? Today we have a very special guest.

Vickie begins playing the "We Three Kings" refrain, and Bob, in costume, bringing in one of the bowls of gem stones, processes down the center aisle from the narthex to join Jean seated on the second stool.

JEAN: Hello, Your Highness! We are so glad to have you here today at Tri Con!

BOB: I'm glad to be here! Thank you for the invitation. But, please, you can call me Bob, Bob the Magus (May' gus).

JEAN: Certainly. I am happy and honored to call you whatever you want, but "Magus?!" What does this mean?

BOB: The hymn speaks of us as kings, but the word that Matthew uses is “magi.” We really weren’t kings, but wise men, astrologer/priests from foreign lands. “Magi” is the plural form, and “magus” is the singular form. So, that’s why I’m a “magus.”

JEAN: Hmm. Magus Bob, we are used to seeing you with two others – the plural form. Can you tell us more about where you have been since Bethlehem and why you are by yourself today?

BOB: *Bob will offer a response in his own words. Something brief, maybe that the different routes they followed led them on separate paths. He was given time travel. They wanted to share the news of the baby’s birth – God’s Savior. And no matter where they traveled, they were always bonded through the light of Christ.*

JEAN: Bob, can we talk about the gifts you gave Jesus?

BOB: Sure.

JEAN: We have a question from one of our adult members.

HJALMAR: *(Jean will hold the mic for the question. In these or his own words:)* Hello, Bob, the Magus. If I may ask, I’ve always wondered why you and your friends didn’t give the baby Jesus a present that he might like, say a rattle, or a stuffed animal, or a toy for him to play with a little later? This is the way we have set up Christmas in our culture; it’s a lot about giving children fun presents.

BOB: *A response that acknowledges the difference between the first Christmas and the way our culture celebrates it today, and that points out that giving gifts like gold, frankincense, and myrrh represented “paying homage” to one in authority – even one divine, and that these gifts also suggested attributes of the new king.*

JEAN: Ah! Carrie and the kids learned about these three gifts a few Sundays ago in Children’s Ministry.

CARRIE: *(To the children, in her own words)* Yes! What do you remember about Gold...Frankincense... and Myrrh...? These were valuable gifts fit for a king – Gold, obviously. Frankincense is an element used in worship during prayer. Myrrh is an aromatic oil, used in burial.

BOB: *If he wants to add anything...*

JEAN: Thank you, Carrie. Magus Bob, can you tell us what it meant to you *personally* to give these gifts to the baby Jesus?

BOB: *A response in his own words that lifts up the ideas of 1) awe, 2) worship – to bow before the Light of God on earth in devotion – to give oneself... and 3) investing in God’s future – what God was doing through this baby and later, as a man. It always does us human beings good to worship through giving! Like what you do at Tri Con when you make pledges and then give in the worship service each week.*

JEAN: We have a question from one of our children.

LINDSEY: *(Jean will hold the mic as she asks the question.)* Hi Bob, what do you think happened to the gifts that you left with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus? Where did they go? What did the family do with them?

BOB: *(In his own words)* That’s an interesting question! I don’t know what happened to them. We didn’t give these gifts with any strings attached. Mary and Joseph could be trusted to use them appropriately.

I’d be glad if the family used this treasure to escape from Herod or to help others do so... I can imagine that there were other circumstances when the family came across someone who was hungry or homeless or poor or sick and helped them out; that would be a good use for this treasure. It would make sense, too, that they saved some for Jesus – maybe for his education, or as capital to launch his ministry, like an investment in his future and what God wanted him to do.

JEAN: Magus Bob, I noticed that you brought more treasure with you today.

BOB: Yes! I’ve brought some treasure to give each of you as followers of Christ. I hope that this ‘gem stone’ will remind you to worship the Light of God this New Year and to invest in what God is doing in 2019.

JEAN: Thank you, Bob!!

I have an idea: the sacrament of Holy Communion is a special practice for us. Like you and the Magi did, we worship and give ourselves to God and experience the awe of Christ’s presence with us during communion. Would you be willing to preside with me at the table? Then, after we receive the bread and cup that symbolize the life of Jesus, we will humbly receive one of your gem stones.

BOB: Yes, I would be honored.

Carrie invites the children, with the exception of the four who will pass out the stones, to return to their families, as **Bob** and **Jean** prepare the table. The four children join the deacons on the front pews.