

Epiphany 2018

In last month's Living Lutheran, Dawn Rundman had an article on Christmas storytelling with children and one of the things she mentioned was the mistake of putting the Wise men in the stable. They actually came later. One way we can communicate to children that Christmas is not a single day is by placing the Wise men someplace else in our house during Advent and Christmas and then on Epiphany, January 6th move the Wise men to be included in the family nativity.

Christmas storytelling, Faith & Family — December 2017, By Dawn Rundman November 29, 2017 Or I was thinking that you could perhaps leave them out until Lent.

This idea stands in stark contrast to commercial Christmas customs. I was in Shopko a week after Christmas and I couldn't resist a peek at the Christmas sales.

A couple of king's crowns for Christmas trees were 75% off, a reminder that the world has had enough of evergreen, shiny bulbs and eggnog.

Stores are already moving on to whatever the next holiday is, perhaps Valentine's Day and candy hearts, red balloons and roses.

But you know what? Christmas isn't so easily forgotten. In fact it simply won't be contained in one night or a 12 day season.

From seminary on, Pastors are taught sometimes even hammered to guard Advent carefully: No Christmas carols until Christmas Eve, not turning on the tree lights etc. and almost every year Christmas sort of sneaks in unexpectedly.

Right in the middle of December, it sort of sneaks up on us and catches us off guard.

And when it happens, what are we to do but enjoy it and be caught by the power of Christmas.

And now here we are in January, most of us have put our decorations away but if your house is like my house, all through the rest of the month, you will be finding Christmas remnants: little things here and there i.e. a bulb under a chair, a hook on a bookshelf, a candle in a bedroom. And once again we will be surprised by Christmas.

Today we celebrate Epiphany. Epiphany is part of the Christmas story.

On this day we remember the Wise men or magi, who traveled from the East to find the incarnation of God, a baby named Jesus.

There is a lot we don't know about these magi.

Tradition tells us there were 3 but Matthew doesn't tell us a number, just that there were 3 gifts.

There are no camels in the Matthew's gospel but probably the idea came from today's Old Testament lesson.

Tradition tells us that they were kings, but that is only a guess. Maybe they were Zoroastrian astrologers.

We don't know where in the East they are from.

Some think they were from Iran. Others that they were Kurds.

And we don't know their names. (Fiction: Gaspar, Melchior, Belthazar)

But we do know that even today, wise men and women all over the world worship Jesus Christ.

On Epiphany, we remember the 3 gifts they brought to the baby Jesus (Gold frankincense and myrrh), but we don't know what happened to these priceless gifts or how they were used.

But what we do know is that Jesus was God's gift to the world and so the Wise men acknowledged him as king with their gifts.

And now, we reflect on what gifts we have been given to share the good news of the gospel.

On Epiphany we remember the star, the great light that led the magi to Bethlehem.

We don't know if that star was Halie's Comet or an asteroid or a meteor shower or an unusual star configuration or just a planet.

But we do know that there in Bethlehem they discovered a child who would become known as the light of the world. And now the light of the Christ shines into our lives in so many ways.

I have a book on my book shelf by John Shea entitled, Starlight: Beholding the Christmas Miracle all year long. I haven't opened that book in nearly 25 years but the title says it all.

The Christmas message that a savior was born for you and for me and that he promises us forgiveness and eternal life, that message of hope is a message worth remember for the whole year.

The miracle of Christmas enables us to live day by day and to sojourn ahead in hope knowing that God is with us always even in the difficult times.

The miracle of Christmas gives us strength and courage to reconcile with someone who has made us angry or who has disappointed us.

The miracle of Christmas enables us to rejoice in the gift of every new life and helps us value all life. That means we are able to see beyond our differences and all the things that separate us like race and gender and ethnic origin and financial situations.

It means we can learn to live as a community with one another.

The miracle of Christmas means we do not have to fear death because we know that in life and death we are held safe in God's hands.

So, the next time you find a little remnant of Christmas under the cushions or in the toy box, don't be too quick to pack it away.

Instead put it in a drawer or on a shelf, somewhere that you will find it again unexpectedly, so that you will be reminded that the real miracle of Christmas is that it is not bound by the calendar.

In fact there is no such thing as "after Christmas," because the good news of Christmas speaks to us anew, day after day, year after year.

Beholding the Christmas Miracle all year long...this is the good news of the gospel. Amen.