

Matthew 2:1-12 ~ Ephesians 3:1-12 The Message Bible
Where is the Child?
 January 5, 2010 ~ Epiphany of the Lord ~ Holy Communion
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Space: The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its 5-year mission: To explore strange new worlds; To seek out new life and new civilizations; To boldly go where no one has gone before. Some of you may be too young to know, but these were the introductory words to the Star Trek television episodes and films, from 1966 onward. And it may stand as holy writ for the Trekkies among us. Do we have any here today? It looks like we do.

Being a child of the 60's, while not a huge fan, even still my mind leaped from the final verse in today's Ephesians text, "When we trust in him, we're... "bold to go wherever we need to go," to that Star Trek famously split infinitive: *To boldly go where no one has gone before.* And then I realized a connection to our scripture text, our sacrament of Holy Communion, and what we are called to celebrate on this day, Epiphany Sunday.

It begins with the question the wisemen asked when they got to Jerusalem: *Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?* A question many of us may be asking today on the first Sunday of 2020: Where is Christ, the Divine Light of boundless compassion-- shining forth, breaking through the darkness of today? Aren't we searching for, yearning for a land where bushes burn, but are not consumed; a land where manna drops from heaven for every hungry person? A land where water can turn into wine—and not just a cheap table wine, but the finest of wines, flowing abundantly beyond what any wedding party could possibly consume. Where is this land where 5 loaves and 2 fish can feed over 5,000 people for lunch? Yes, I believe we are still seeking places where disproportionate, extravagant grace breaks through. We know where it needs to. We live so many of our days in the land of hurt and hate; hyperbole and low-blows. We live in a place bounded by bad stories that we wish we could change or at least let go of.

The strange new life, of abundant grace and abounding purpose, created by God from the beginning of time, was revealed as never before, in this child born king of the Jews. This baby named Jesus, who moved into the neighborhood and grew up to show us all a strange new world of "grace upon grace." Grace that appears when we least expect it. Grace that breaks down barriers. Grace for everyone across the board: outsiders and insiders alike. This Grace, may seem like a distant fantasy that preachers like to talk about. More like science fiction than real life. Something tantalizing, but not really inhabitable.

I will boldly claim on this first Sunday of the year and the decade--that we are all aboard God's Starship Enterprise. And our mission is to land this ship. Yes, our mission is to reveal right here and now, the coming of God's kingdom: God's way of justice and mercy for all creation made visible in Christ. We have just the one planet and our time to do our part to complete this mission is growing short. Epiphany may be more critical to our mission at this point in time than Christmas. Epiphany, was actually celebrated by Christians for a whole century *before* Christmas ever was. You may be scratching your head, trying to remember what that churchy sounding

word means. Here it is: “Epiphany” comes from the Greek, “epiphaneia” which is translated as “showing” or “manifestation” or “revelation.” “Epiphany of the Lord” was a day to celebrate the moment or moments when Jesus’ divinity became evident.

At the very beginning of our Christian tradition, these moments were identified as the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist; and the first miracle of Jesus, the wedding in Cana where he changed the water into wine. It wasn’t until about a hundred years later, that Matthew’s story about the wisemen from the East was added to the constellation of Epiphany stories. This story, in Matthew 2, of the foreigners seeking out the child born King of the Jews, added another dimension to who Jesus was and why he landed on planet earth. This epiphany story suggests that from the time of his birth on earth, Jesus’ very existence began to break down barriers between Jews and Gentiles. This kind of break down rarely comes without a fight. The threat of Jesus’ birth frightened the terrorist King Herod to commit atrocities beyond the story line of Star Trek, Star Wars, or even the Game of Thrones. Only this was no game, nor a movie or TV show.

What about real us, now over 2,000 years later? Where does Christ appear in our world? I have good news for you. If you really want to see Christ, the child who was born King of the Jews, if you want to experience an epiphany of the Lord--you came to the right place at the right time. In this holy meal this very morning, we will have an opportunity to connect in body and in spirit, with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one whose blood can heal, and restore us and this broken world. How can that be, you may wonder, in your heart of hearts. Here it is: Our Lord and Savior boldly went where no man or woman has gone before. Not with star ships, or war ships, nor with fleets of warriors. Our Lord and Savior revealed a different kind of force: **Bold humility**. In the breaking of the bread. Our King of Kings and Lord of Lords, looked into the faces of his disciples, including his betrayer and said, “This is my body broken for you.” This is how you land the power of Love.

This holy meal is unlike any other on this earth. Even the look of it will cue you that this is no ordinary meal. Where else would we ingest a speck of bread and a teaspoon of juice and call it a feast!? Where else could we remember Jesus’ horrific death on the cross and yet knowing the ultimate outcome call it “joyful feast” and really mean it? At what other table are Kings like Herod set aside? At what other table do we feast with all the saints including our family, friends and heroes who have died to this earth and are living in heaven? At what other table could a community of faith like FPC find the courage to boldly go where FPC has never gone before?

At this table, we see divine love embodied: blessed, broken, and given for you. The love that breaks down our sin of looking for security and for power in all the wrong places. This love that calls for sacrifice. At this table we will find our grounding again in God, and one another. The vertical connection with God and the horizontal connection with one another, right at this table. Here we can gain perspective, the kind that astronomers who orbit the globe can see. But we don’t have to put on a space suit--for us it is here at this Table. This Table of “grace upon grace” (John 1:16).

But here's the challenge: Can you really trust the man who was born in a barn and buried in a borrowed grave? The man whose final show of strength and purpose was to strip off his robe, take up a towel, and wash the 24 dirty, dusty, smelly feet of his twelve disciples? Our Lord and Captain calls forth new ways of thinking about power, about success, about fulfillment. New ways of behaving that will stretch and challenge us every day we are blessed to live on this earth.

Let's be honest: bold humility goes against our grain. If that's what Jesus is about, do we really want to find this child? Can we be people who reveal the inexhaustible fire of Christ's compassion to others? I know we can. I know we have. And I know we can do more. Christ is calling us to be a church that arises and shines with the light of "can-do" and "will-do" with bold humility. I know we are a people who would rather feed the hungry and welcome the stranger than talk about it. That's what we signed up for when we made the commitment to be a "Matthew 25" church. Following that bold vision, led by One who comes to lead us out of our slavery to the sin of sameness. Our slavery to comfort above cause, our slavery to the god of "we've always done it this way."

Do we have the courage to practice a faith that allows Christ to break the boundaries, the either/or categories that we have been taught? This is what the Letter to the Ephesians is plainly telling us. At the DNA level we now know these differences are nothing more than social constructs. As Carl Sagan, the American Astronomer, educator and author, has written: in our essence we are all stardust. "The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star stuff."ⁱ We are all made of the same stuff, connected and interdependent, whether we like it or not. This is God's doing, God's plan from the beginning.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made the same point in a different way in April of 1963 from the Birmingham jail when he wrote: "I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider."ⁱⁱ Dr. King wrote those words in 1963—now more than a half-century ago.

Where is the child in 2020? When compassion breaks the barriers that divide us, when the beautiful light breaks through another false dichotomy, there the Christ will be found. The bad stories that tell us we are better than, more than, more deserving than: Those stories are not Christ's story. We will not find the child in those stories. They contradict the truth we see and feel in the broken body of Christ at this table. What bad stories and bad habits is Christ calling us to break free from this year?

On the dawn of this new decade, we have a chance today to come to this table, and to go home seeing the world, in a different light. The child we seek is the Light of the World that infuses us with new possibility and hope, no matter how dead we may feel inside. No matter

how concerned we may be about the escalation of conflict with Iran, the rise in anti-Semitism and hate crimes across our land, the coarsening of our political discourse on all sides, and the accelerating rise of the oceans' temperature and the threat of our ecological demise. When we let Jesus break down our prejudices, our bad stories and bad habits, the One who is found in the breaking of the bread, will lead us by the hand into the land of inexhaustible bushes and multiplying loaves. Can we boldly, humbly go, where Divine Love calls us?

Come, to the Table of Grace. See Christ, revealed.

ⁱ <https://gaspire.com/2015/03/25/we-are-made-of-star-stuff-carl-sagan/>

ⁱⁱ <https://qz.com/328913/martin-luther-king-jr-s-1963-letter-from-birmingham-jail-remains-relevant-today/>