

Sermon: Seeing through a new lens

Shelby Owen, Steve Berneking, Riikka Halme-Berneking, Kristin Holbrook, Ralph Steger and June Steger, and Mitzi White

2 Christmas, Year A

Emmanuel, Staunton

Matthew 2:1-12

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I remember back in 8th grade, my friend Cathy got glasses. I was with her as her parents drove her home, she got out of the car, looked up and seeing the birds, and the tree branches, she exclaimed, "Look! There are birds! And trees!" Her joy was overwhelming and it was infectious. It is amazing what new glasses can do for a person, even if they take some getting used to.

In our reading from Matthew today, we hear the story of Herod and the wise men, of Mary and Jesus. We hear a story of a star and a baby, a story of deceit and truth, a story of searching and finding. Today we are going to consider the viewpoint of all of these key characters in the story, and what lenses they see through.

Herod (Shelby) I am Herod, a king of the region where a baby has been born. These magi, wise men from the east, have just come to Jerusalem and they say they are searching for a child who has been born king of the Jews. While I would never admit this out loud to anyone, I am frightened! And I feel threatened. Aren't I the king around here? How dare someone suggest there is another king? I must be careful, even devious so that I can eliminate this threat. I will secretly call these magi to me and act as though I am interested in honoring this baby king. Then I will do whatever I must in order to have this baby killed. My fear will not allow me to love this baby. The possibility of my power being lessened will drive my hatred toward him.

The Magi (Steve Berneking) : We are astrologers from the East...think Persia or Babylonia...experts in studying the stars; we interpret what we see happening in the heavens. The star that announced the birth of a king was an especially rare sighting. We were so excited! In fact, we felt obligated to follow it, to pay our respects to this newborn king. This star led us directly to him! When we found him, we gave the family the few spices and gold pieces we had with us.

Now, King Herod was worried about this rival king and intended to use us to tell him where the baby was. But, because we can interpret dreams and read signs, we figured out what was going on; so we fooled him and went back home without telling him.

Priest (Ralph Steger): I am one of the priests and scribes that King Herod consulted regarding the birthplace of the next King of the Jews. He didn't know, but we did. We know the prophesy. It will be in Bethlehem the city of David. (Putting on the glasses.) When I look to the future, I see the child growing into his kingship, taking up arms, and leading our people in revolt against the Romans. And winning!! Then we will be free to rule Jerusalem, our religion, and all of Israel. And some of us will be ready for that!

Joseph (Kristin Holbrook) My name is Joseph; I am Mary's husband. I had stepped out for a bit, and when I got back, everyone was talking about these foreign men who had come from far away. At first, I was horrified and angry. These men were foreigners and Gentiles. I am a righteous, Jewish man, who loves and follows the law. Gentiles are not supposed to come into our home. I have already had to deal with the questions and criticism because I didn't dismiss Mary. I can only imagine what this kind of spectacle will do to my already diminished reputation. And yet, the entire thing also has my mind spinning. How did these men know about Jesus? They travelled for months, from lands so far away. Gentiles? Really?

Mary (Riikka Halme-Berneking): I am Mary. So here we are living our normal family life with a baby, and I'd almost forgotten about the abnormal beginning of the pregnancy, and the frightening moment of dear Joseph's fears and doubts, and my huge relief when he decided he should marry me after all.

But now, who are these strange men who seem to be convinced, after having done their research and reading the stars, that they have found here in our home a newborn king? I know there is something special about this child...but a king?

I am touched by these learned men's kindness and passion. They are so happy to have found what they were looking for :) It feels quite special to have them here. And at the same time I worry: is somebody trying to make our son a king? Will he be safe? I will do all that is in my power to protect him. He is my dear son, after all.

Jesus (June Steger) It has been a busy day here: so many people coming and going. I wonder what they are thinking about? I wonder what will happen next...

We've heard the story from different lenses, different viewpoints.

We invite you to take some time to reflect on the glasses that you see through. How might God be inviting you to see the new year 2020 through a new set of glasses? Like Herod, will you approach the unknown future with glasses of fear and angst, of harsh judgment and worry? Or like the magi, see the future with wonder and faith as you seek God's face? Like Jesus will you choose the lens of love? Choose to see yourself and the world with compassion? Choose glasses of mercy, or kindness, or peace and hope?

It is amazing what new glasses can do for a person, even if they take some getting used to.

We have cardboard glasses for everyone to decorate with words or images. You can do this during communion time here at church, or you can decorate them at home. Children are welcome to go to the back of church to work on glasses with Rev. Kristin.