



January 2019 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

“In the time of King Herod...” that’s how the story begins.

“In the time of King Herod...” He built monumental structures including the Second Jewish Temple, the mountaintop palace at Masada and the palatial Herodium complex whose desert palace included a grand residence, a theater and large pools, baths and gardens. When his position was seemingly threatened, he did not hesitate for a second but had his wife killed and at least two of his sons.

“In the time of King Herod...” He dominates the story. Of the twelve verses of the Epiphany Gospel, Matthew 2:1-12, he controls the action in ten of them. He rules a world dominated by his authority, his power, his ruthlessness.

King Herod so rules over the world, over this story, that it would be easy to miss the good news of the birth of an infant for it is almost buried, almost hidden, almost veiled in the reality dominated by Herod.

It is no wonder then that he, and all of Jerusalem with him, are stunned by the arrival of wise men from the East who come to Jerusalem wishing to pay tribute to a “child who has been born king of the Jews.” It frightens him, and all Jerusalem and he moves quickly to control, to assess, to dominate calling the religious leaders together and then secretly meeting the wise men.

And later we will learn that Herod had been fooled by these wise foreigners – fooled but not beaten. He fights back as cruelty does and has all the infants slaughtered.

“In the time of King Herod...”

This is not an easy, gentle story – but the gospel writer, Matthew’s witness, does not shy away from recognizing that the good news of Jesus – of the birth of the Christ-child, “the king of the Jews” is surrounded by, it is immersed in, harsh reality. And that beneath this reality as defined by Herod – almost hidden, almost veiled – is the truth.

Foreigners arrive in Jerusalem with wealth to place at the crib of a Jewish baby. And, in this act of homage, they become the first to see what God is up to in the birth of this infant. An epiphany which means something like manifestation, or unveiling, or revealing the truth. That the steadfast love of God is met in the flesh and blood of Jesus, born of Mary and that it is veiled, revealed in weakness, hidden in poverty, seen in helplessness.

The gospel writer's witness invites us to see that the epiphany is not obvious. Rather, it is fragile, tenuous, dreamlike, as vulnerable as an unnoticed baby in a god-forsaken little village, witnessed to by foreigners, in a land ruled by Herod.

And this is where we find ourselves. For if we are to be a people who seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ, "in the time of King Herod," then we are invited to see God at work in the hidden, veiled, fragile, tenuous, vulnerable, weak, poor; in people and places and events one would hardly notice at all.

For what child is this whose epiphany is so quiet, so unobtrusive, little more than a whisper and yet this one is known, is revealed in the sharing of a little piece of bread and a sip of wine?

For what child is this whose epiphany is so fragile, so veiled, in a village fifteen kilometers from the center of power in Jerusalem and yet this one is baptized, and we are ourselves, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, are named and claimed children of God?

For what child is this whose birth in a manger is witnessed hardly at all, and who is killed on a cross embracing the whole world. A story from start to finish surrounded by loss and grief and yet a story that ends in surprising, new life?

"In the time of King Herod..." And soon this family will be running to Egypt.

God give us eyes, new eyes, to see You at work among us. And then nurtured in the water and the Word of our baptism, nourished in the communion meal, and upheld in community move us to action for the fragile, tenuous, vulnerable, weak, poor.

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

"The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)