

## Matthew 2:1-12

Did you think Christmas is over? Well, the Christian season of Christmas officially ended last Friday on Epiphany, but we are celebrating Epiphany today, the day the wisemen from the east came to find the new king. A catch phrase from Christmas a few years ago was “Wise men still seek him”, which actually means “wise people still seek him.” and begs the question, “Where are you looking for God?”

When I was a young child I heard my aunt relaying the story of how her young son, my cousin Lester, wasn't in his bed one night when they checked before she and her husband went to bed. They searched the house; they checked around to see if he was playing outside. They couldn't find him anywhere. In a bit of a panic, they phoned the police and an all out search began for him. The police told my aunt and uncle to stay home in case he showed up there. A couple of hours later the search was called off because my cousin crawled out from behind the couch where he had hidden after sneaking out of bed and where he fell sound asleep. A happy ending.

Sometimes when we are looking for God it seems as though, just like those hours that Les was missing, it seems as though God isn't anywhere to be found. I wonder if that's how those wise men felt as they traveled across the desert. They were searching for something that their studies had revealed would be an awesome powerful king, but they weren't finding him where they supposed he would be. When they went to the most powerful king of the land, King Herod, he seemed to be more than befuddled, he seemed to be afraid that their predictions had led them on a journey to find a new king. A new king in his territory that he knew nothing about; something that he perceived as a threat to his royal power.

Instead of turning these sojourners away, he went with their information and had his scribes find anything they could about a new king. They discovered the new king was to be born in Bethlehem. In his wily ways Herod got as much information out of the Magi about the birth as he possibly could and asked them to come back to him after they'd found the child so he could honor him as well. We know he had no intention of honoring someone who could take away his throne. And God wasn't going to allow him to murder the Messiah, so the angel came to the Magi telling them to return home another way.

Unfortunately, that didn't dissuade Herod from trying to eliminate the child who would be king. He ordered all the boys under age 2 be killed. Again, God didn't allow his Messiah to be murdered; an angel came to Joseph and the holy family slipped away in the night to live in Egypt, safe from the reach of Herod. It is commonly thought that the gifts of the Magi were what funded their travel and stay in Egypt. But God did allow all the other boys under 2 years of age to have their lives taken away. We can't help but wonder why God would allow such a heinous thing to take place. We wonder why God would allow so many terrible, painful things to occur throughout history, and in our own lives. I wish there were a pat, easy answer to give you. I wish I could explain away tragic deaths, pain, and suffering. I wish I could say why God doesn't answer all our prayers in the way we would like them to be answered.

This past week the news was filled with news about the Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin, the cardiac arrest he suffered on the field, the prayers of so many people, and how he has recovered enough to speak with his teammates. And we rejoice in his recovery. Yet that same night two police officers near Pittsburgh were attacked in the line of duty. One didn't make it, I don't really know the fate of the other, because I haven't seen it mentioned on the news. Those

men's lives were as important as the football player, but the prayers weren't answered in the same way. I don't know why.

I've been told instead of asking the question "Why?", to ask the question "Why not?" Why would we expect there to be no tragedy in the world? After all, it is a world where evil exists and sometimes, in my own opinion, I think that like Satan tested Job's faith, Satan is testing our faith, waiting to see if he can win us over to his side. And maybe that's exactly what is happening, and why we need to continue our search for God.

Where is God when all the unexplainable things happen to us? God is right there next to us, suffering right along with us. God has experienced, through the life of Jesus, every loss, every temptation, every disappointment we feel. God, even when it seems as though sometimes we keep searching and don't see him, God, is right there with us, offering us comfort and love and even something no one else can offer, God is offering us salvation.

I wonder if those wise men who returned home a different way didn't also return home as different people, with different beliefs. I wonder if their hearts weren't changed by the birth of a baby, who happened to be walking and just about talking at the time of their visit. I wonder if they too didn't spread the news of this new King who came, not to rule with the tyrannical, paranoid, competitive, jealous, bloodthirsty methods of the current ruler king Herod, but a King who came to rule with the authority and power of God to show the world a new way. The Magi had to travel many miles to find this child. We don't have to search for him; we simply have to invite him in with a prayer.

All glory be to God.