

Matthew 2: 1-12 "Three Men and A Baby" Rev. Janet Chapman 1/6/19

So what happens when a Vulcan directs a movie about 3 roommates who unexpectedly become caregivers for an infant child? You get a lot of laughs. In this 1987 comedy, directed by Leonard Nimoy and a personal favorite of mine, we meet a hunky architect, Peter, played by Tom Selleck; a sensitive artist, Michael, played by Steve Guttenberg; and a playboy actor Jack played by Ted Danson. They are eligible bachelors living in New York who work hard and play harder. One morning, Peter the architect discovers baby Mary on their doorstep with a note from her mother. Apparently, Jack the actor unknowingly fathered a child with a fellow co-star. That is problem number one. Problem number two is that the new daddy is now away in Turkey for 10 weeks while he films a bit part in a terrible 80s spoof about a bar where everyone knows your name – sound familiar? Problem number three is that Peter has spent too many years living it up in Hawaii to know how to take care of a baby and is a strong Type A personality who doesn't handle surprises well. Michael the artist is an overly emotional type who takes things personally and attended the wrong type of academy to be any sort of majordomo in their household. A series of mishaps occur which lead the Type A professional and overly emotional artist to not only muddle through caring for a baby, but negotiate getting rid of illegal drugs delivered to their home, battle scary drug dealers, and help police arrest the offenders. All of this is done because of, and without, Mary's birth father whose name is mud, as far as Peter and Michael are concerned. However, Jack ends up having his part cut out of the Turkish film and he surprisingly returns home early. He denies knowing anything about drugs, dealers, and most importantly, little babies. After reading the note left by Mary's mother, Sylvia, he realizes who she is and takes full responsibility for his new daughter, something very uncharacteristic for him. Now Mary has three daddies all to herself as all three men build

relationships with her in their own way. They feed her, bathe her, read to her and give her all the loving a child could want. They dare to imagine life as a dad. Then, out of the blue, Sylvia shows up to take Mary away, believing she can raise her in England with the help of her family there along with pursuing her acting career. The men are heartbroken and after Sylvia and Mary leave for the airport, Peter realizes there is something about that little baby he cannot let go of. That child holds his heart and his imagination, as she does for the other two, so all three men rush to the terminal and arrive just in time to see the plane pulling away from the gate. Yes, there was a time, not too long ago, when 3 grown men could run screaming through an airport terminal with no ticket or ID in order to stop a plane and security wouldn't even take a second look. As the movie comes to an end, the men return home sad and dejected only to find Sylvia and baby Mary sitting on their doorstep, ready and willing to give it a go, to live long and prosper with the dads who helped create a whole new idea of family.

Three men and a baby – a familiar story on this day we call Epiphany. Epiphany is a fancy word in church circles for the manifestation of the Divine. It is the great revelation of the Christ child directly connected to the visit of the three wise men, which were more accurately astrologers. Of course, we don't know for sure there were three, tradition has only assumed this because three gifts are given. The scripture only indicates it was more than one astrologer who travelled to the home of the Child. The numbers didn't matter as much as what happened to those scientists having encountered the mystery of that Holy Child born under a brilliant star seen for years in advance of the birth. These individuals were not unlike us – caught up in a mechanical, heartless world where wonder and awe were foreign commodities. Like for Peter, Michael, and Jack, life loses its luster when we are consumed with ourselves only, when

mystery is missing from our world. Albert Einstein said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.” It is that mystery, that wonder, that capacity to dream that the baby Mary unleashes in the movie and that Jesus frees in the foreigners who pay him homage. The fictional dads have epiphany moments throughout the movie culminating in the end where we recognize their love for the child has transformed them. Gone is the narcissism, the greed, and self-centeredness. Instead we witness selfless concern for others and a desire to be the best person one can be for the sake of the child. The same goes for the wise ones who meet the Christ Child – gone is their promise to return to Herod and reveal the Child’s whereabouts, gone is their willingness to acquiesce to power to keep foreign relations in good standing. Instead, we witness a courage and resolve to go home another way, as the text states. These are not the same travelers as before.

About 10 years ago, a bishop returned home from Africa where he had discussed the issue of ordaining women with African bishops who were opposed to the idea. He made the following observation: “Their objections seemed to be less theologically based than I had supposed. It was more that they couldn’t imagine a woman in that role. They cannot do what they cannot imagine.” They cannot do what they cannot imagine. It is these situations where the mystery of God being born in a fragile and vulnerable baby is most needed. There are places in our nation where contemporary Herods have shut down our imagination, have made us believe the dangers are too high, where we cannot even begin to imagine new beginnings, safety without walls, justice without vengeance, success without egotism. That is exactly where the mystery of the birth of the Christ child is most needed. God’s love changes wherever and whomever it touches. What will you dare to imagine on this Epiphany Sunday?