

7/14/24 sermon

A couple of weeks ago a friend of mine posted on Facebook that it was 180 days until Christmas. She lives for Christmas, she does. She never takes one of her trees down. We don't either, but I think that is more out of opportunity than anything else. But she intentionally is always talking about Christmas. And on her post, people start just ripping into her about how Hobby Lobby has Christmas up all year long. And it wasn't even the 4th of July yet but you could start seeing things at Target, Walmart, and anywhere else. And they are just bashing her for it.

And I jumped on and said, you know what? We have a Christmas in July every year because of people like you. Because all of you are talking about hate and you are throwing out hostilities and you are not accepting her for who she is. And that is what we need to remember. By the time July comes around, we have forgotten everything that we learned during Christmas. We have forgotten about sharing, hope, love, joy, and peace. Christmas is the only time of year that we do that. It is the only time we all come together, that we accept everybody's differences; that we accept who we are. We share God's love unquestioning. We just do it, whether we are Christians, Jewish, Muslims, whatever.

People are sharing God's love that time of year, and we forget by July all about it. We have gotten wrapped up in ourselves, our own lives. We have gotten wrapped up in everything going on and we forgot what we learned about Christmas. We forget that Jesus was brought into this world to live like us, to be like us, to be human. We have forgotten he goes through the same struggles we go through when he died and was resurrected for us. And I always think that in July it is so important we remember these things, especially with everything happening lately in the world. Everybody is forgetting about this.

I had a discussion with somebody last week. She asked why there is so much violence in the Bible. That is a good question. Why is there so much violence. It does cover 6,000 years and it is the same as social media now. They are going to hit all the negative, so that we can remember. But the beginning of the Bible starts with a war. It starts with the war between light and darkness. So from the beginning we learn about conflict. We learn one has to be right over the other and we treat that daily. We have a hard time accepting what people say. We have a hard time accepting views that are different from our own.

Today's reading we are talking about the birth of Christ, obviously. But when you think about the birth of Christ, the story that you know, don't you think that the shepherds and wisemen are there together. When we set up the manger up front each year, we always put them together. But Matthew doesn't talk about the shepherds, and Luke doesn't talk about the wisemen. The two chapters we do talk about the birth of Christ, they are both separated. And I think it is interesting because Matthew was a Jewish Christian, and Luke was a Gentile. But the two write about the opposite faiths.

The shepherds that would come to see Jesus were Jewish. They were reached out to by the angels that the Messiah has been born. Their savior has been born. And Matthew who should have known that already talks about the Gentiles coming and visiting. The wisemen would have been Babylonians during this time. They are the first people who come and try to find Jesus. That's why they went to Jerusalem first. That's why they went to Harrod. They assumed that is where the King of the Jews would be born. He would be in Jerusalem. They didn't know anything else. They knew the star. They had seen it. They had seen the

calculations. They had done all of this finding out. All of this figuring out where he would be. And they had faith that he was going to be the Savior, that he was going to be the Messiah. They had so much faith they went to find the baby they knew nothing about.

It is something to think about for a second. It makes sense that through Jesus's ministry that he would have talked to the Gentiles. That he talked to people who weren't Jewish, that didn't understand all of his faith and they would be looking for it. This is a baby. A baby who didn't say anything. Who did not do anything. He was simply born, but they had enough faith that they wanted to see him. They didn't have an understanding at all about the Jewish customs and heritage. If they did, they would not have said, "Where is the King of Jews?" They would have said, "Where is the King of Israel?"

So that is why they met with the scribes and the priests, to find out more about the Jewish culture. To find out more about his heritage. And that's when they quoted the book of Myka. Bethlehem would have been where the baby was born.

King Herrod at this time was a terrible person. Absolutely awful. He killed his wife's family because he thought they might try to take his throne. He killed all kinds of people because he was afraid he was going to lose power. So when these Gentiles came to him and said the king of Jews was just born, that was a huge threat for him. Huge threat. So he figured he could manipulate the wisemen. If they go and find this baby then he can send everybody else to go and find the baby and kill him before anything happens to him. Before he loses his power. But we know that doesn't happen. We know the wise men figure out this isn't right. SOMething is going on here. And that is why Herrod then decides to kill every male child under the age of two. He didn't know when they double crossed him. They didn't know how they double crossed him, but he knew this way he was going to take care of it.

And that is an easy solution right. If we do not like something, we fight against it. We find a way to end it. If we do not like what somebody says, we can get into fights. If they work for us, we can fire them. And if we're related to him we're kind of in trouble unless you're Herrod, just kill off the whole family.

But we don't have that option, and we shouldn't have that option. That shouldn't be our go to. Our go to in conflict should not be fighting. It shouldn't be convincing people that they're wrong. It shouldn't be promoting hate. Instead we should be looking at the rest of it. We should be looking at what he is asking us. We should be looking at how we can love them more. How we can find the peaceful solution with them? How one day they might see the light and their faith may hold them stronger. Those are the things we should be looking for instead of focusing on the easy part of it. It is hard to love people. It is hard to listen to someone rant over and over and not get angry.

The wisemen are believed to be three because they gave three gifts. And the three gifts. And the three gifts they gave Jesus were very important things that unless you were Jewish, you wouldn't understand. Obviously we all know the value of gold and it was to represent that they believed him to be royal. He is from Bethlehem. He is from David, He is from that lineage. So they're going to present it that way. They gave him myrrh. At this time, myrrh was used as a painkiller. For people who are dying. it was the cover of the smell. and then they used it as an embalming fluid So reading the scriptures when they are with the priests and the scribes they knew that Jesus was royalty and they knew he was going to die. and then the last thing they gave him was frankincense frankincense is a very powerful perfume. they

used it in their worship services to represent Resurrection. So these wise men that were Babylonians were Gentiles who knew nothing about the Jewish culture and traditions learned in a matter of days and gave him three gifts that symbolize what he was going to do for us. He was going to lead us like royalty; he was going to die for us. And he was going to be Resurrected so that our sins will be forgiven. They had so much faith in this little baby they had never seen and never met but they already had love for him. They had the love that we celebrate every Advent season and Christmas all through the beginning of the new year that somehow we forget by June. They had more faith in that little baby than some people have their entire life, not us.

We clearly remember Jesus's love every week, not just on Sunday. We see on Mondays when we're calling to check on our friends and family. We see it on Tuesdays when we're out meeting people in public. We say hello and wish them well. We asked them how their last week was. We see it on Wednesday when we're feeding kids that have nowhere else to go. They don't feel the love that we share and give each week. we can keep going but we get the point. We do a great job of sharing out love in the community, not just here but everywhere. And we need it so much right now.

Yesterday's events are events that are reminders that there are people out there who don't think like us. There are people out there who don't celebrate God's love for us as much as they should. But remember that we can make that difference. We show God's love to somebody today that may change their mind about tomorrow. That might get them to start living and sharing God's love through everybody.