

A Camel on the Roof
Matthew 2:1-12
NUCC Traditional
06 January 2019 – Epiphany

*PRAY

I wonder if the Wise Ones were disappointed. Think about it: they traveled many miles by camel to discover that the star had come to rest over a stable. **They had followed a star and found a stable.** Surely, they were expecting a palace, or perhaps a stately mansion. Think how they must have felt, their vast disappointment as they looked down from some nearby Judean hill and came to the realization that their destination was a stable. I don't know about you, but I've had moments like that in my life. There have been times when I followed a star, when I followed something that seemed shiny and exciting, only to discover a stable, something ordinary and plain.

I am fascinated that our passage for this morning has caused so much controversy among Biblical scholars. There is debate about how many wise men there were, or whether they were indeed all men. There is controversy about the gift of myrrh, a costly embalming oil, and whether or not it prophesied about the way Jesus would die 33 years later. What exactly scared Herod about the birth of Jesus? Why did he call for others to do his dirty work? There is a lot of controversy around stars and stables.

It reminds me of the old joke about the two people who were sitting together on an airplane. As sometimes happen, they began to get acquainted. One person was an astronomer, the other a theologian. After a while each began to share their understanding of the other's discipline. The astronomer said, "I believe that all religion can be summed up in the phrase, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'" The theologian, somewhat miffed at this simplistic understanding of his scholarly

discipline, said, “And I believe that all astronomy can be summed up with the phrase, ‘Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are.’

There is a rich story rooted in Islamic tradition in modern-day Afghanistan about a beloved king. This king was wealthy according to every earthly measure. At the same time, however, he sincerely and restlessly strove to be spiritually wealthy as well.

"One night the king was roused from sleep by a fearful stumping on the roof above his bed. Alarmed, he shouted: 'Who's there?' 'A friend,' came the reply from the roof. 'I've lost my camel.' Perturbed by such stupidity, the king shouted: 'You fool! Are you looking for a camel on the roof?'

'You fool!' the voice from the roof answered. 'Are you looking for God in silk clothing, and lying on a golden bed?' “

The camel on the roof raises the Epiphany question: **Where are you looking for God?** This compelling question of life appropriately stands at the beginning of a new year. It is the ultimate reminder that God is not to be found where the world's powers reside, but rather, in the ordinary, sometimes even mundane, places of life. To find God we must walk with the homeless and the hopeless. We must engage with those who are different than us. We must seek ideas that sometimes leave us perplexed and staring at a stable when we had been following a star.

And maybe that’s what 2019 will teach us: to be at peace with the ordinary, rather than always seeking the extraordinary. Perhaps we will learn that God is rarely found in places of power and prestige, but more often with those whom society has pushed to the sides. Perhaps this will be the year we will actually seek more stables, rather than more stars, when we will witness God in the everyday, rather than just

simply at Christmas and Easter. Perhaps 2019 will be the year when we will once again address the challenges of our day not with more magic answers, but with more faithful questions.

Where are you looking for God? Perhaps today is a day to find God in the ordinary gifts of this Table. Maybe today is a day when you see God in the ordinary offering of canned food to Grace Place that will feed hungry people in Golden Gate Estates. You know, I've seen it with my own eyes. I have seen a tiny, ordinary food pantry come alive while people literally lined up for hours before the doors open.

And I stood there, next to the chair of our Board of Mission and Outreach, David Hindman, with tears in my eyes, and began to realize that the food on the shelves was there because you had brought it. There were hungry people dwelling in scarcity on one side of the door, knowing that they would soon experience abundance on the other side, because of *you*. Because of your generosity and your willingness month-in and month-out to bring seemingly insignificant cans of, literally put food into the mouths of hungry children.

My friends, I have experienced it firsthand. I have **looked** for God in extraordinary places, but I have actually **found** God in ordinary ones.

And I hope you will too...