

January 3, 2021: “Awakening”

ONE SERVICE ONLY

10:45am: Ps 72: 1-7, 10-14; Matthew 2: 1-12

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are embarking upon a new sermon series entitled
“Awakening”**

- The rationale behind this sermon series is now that we have spent some enlightening and at times challenging times as the result of exploring the holiness with our darkness; however it has manifested itself;
- Now is the time where as a church, we can explore how we might have been awakened as a result of our dark journey.
- So similar to how I lead the Holy Darkness series; each week we will explore how the scriptures have awakened us; naming those awakening moments.
- And to share the definition of what it means to be awakened to ensure that we are all on the same spiritual and theological page;

- **A spiritual awakening** refers to a shift in consciousness, an apperception of reality which had been previously unrealized.
- **A spiritual awakening** is the culmination of such realizations; it is the recognition of oneness with all of existence.
- So applying this concept our gospel today; what we are embarking upon is the Epiphany
- The **Epiphany** is a Christian **holiday** primarily commemorating the Magi's visit to the baby Jesus and the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.
- Now Eastern traditions, which usually call the **holiday** Theophany, focus on Jesus' baptism, seen as the manifestation of Christ as both fully human and fully divine.
- Either way what a great scripture for a new year for us to explore how we might be spiritually awakened;
- And where I am seeing a spiritual awakening is in the birth of Christ;

- For because you and I have spend some difficult weeks naming our darkness;
- Perhaps it may be easier for us to not only identify why Jesus was born;
- But because of the intensity of the darkness that we all are enduring, we may also understand **why Jesus had to be born;**
- Because if I could put it in plain terms; the entire world from my perspective then and now needed a Savior;
- And I know that Jesus as Savior does not resonate with everyone;
- For depending on what side of oppression we may find ourselves on;
- Depending on what side of the darkness we may find ourselves on;
- Will determine if the metaphor of Jesus as Savior is accessible;

- For the darkness I have experienced as a Black woman, will not be the same as someone from a different cultural background;
- In fact metaphorically speaking; some of the world is facing darkness all of the time while others have at least access to the light;
- For I stopped by to suggest that our world views are different depending on what box we find ourselves checking when asked for our gender, ethnicity and so forth;
- But here is the Spiritual Awakening I am seeing occur through the birth of Jesus or at least this is what the prayer is;
- For I believe that God even in all of the realities that I have shared as it pertains to our collective experiences; would still suggest that the world needed a Savior then and the World needs a Savior right now;
- Why?

- Because just as in our gospel then and in the times we live in today; there are some that are completely indifferent to the struggles of others;
- There are some that are also not aware of the struggles of others;
- For some, the sun is always shining or at least frequently enough;
- For some, issues such as poverty, marginalization, all of the isms out there, racism, sexism, ageism and so forth; for some these issues do not impact them;
- So regardless of whether it is intended or not; it is human nature to sometimes overlook things that do not impact us directly;
- It is sometimes easy to dismiss another person's struggle if our life stories do not resonate with us;
- For example, pre-Covid, I really never gave it too much thought when scientists would talk about viruses because always being blessed to live here in the US, it was something I never had to worry about;

- And I don't know about you, I still have to sometime pinch myself to make sure I am not in a dream;
- It is still sobering if I am honest if I watch a commercial with people masks on;
- It's also ironically bizarre seeing commercials where people are not wearing masks...
- If I am honest, this liminal space I find myself in is just well strange.
- Furthermore, I still can't tell which image troubles me more.
- These are indeed strange times that I find myself as I grasp for understanding in my own spiritual awakening moments.
- Many of you may have seen the pic of Jael and myself taken by Ilesha on Facebook;
- The sobering reality for most of us is that the only face that has been visible for the longest is Matt and myself when speaking/preaching;

- When Jael took her mask off and I placed my shield down for that moment to have our pics taken; half of the team literally gasped at the sight of her beautiful face;
- It was bizarre because you all; I had not seen Jael's face for weeks since Judy Lane so lovingly sewed masks for the team.
- But again, it wasn't until living through this pandemic experience that I am now more in tuned with the world surrounding me.
- I am more aware of how truly interconnected we all are;
- **Looking at our gospel today; Modern Christmas scenes often picture three wise men kneeling before the baby Jesus in a manger.**
- But here we are told that they found **the young child** in a **house**.
- Luke tells us that the night Jesus was born shepherds found the babe in a manger.
- But the scene here is something different. Herod had inquired of the Magi "exactly what time the star appeared" (v. 7).

- On the basis of the information he received he ordered all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age to be slain (v. 16).
- And so stepping outside of this story, I realized that I would bet that **depending on one's** worldview at the time;
- **Depending on someone's** situation during this time;
- The news of what Herod was doing which was terrible;
- Seeking out male babies to kill them;
- Depending on one's circumstances, this news could be terribly horrifying;
- However as I reflect on where we are as a world today, I wonder if everyone's view was this way;
- **For depending** if a person had a child or not;
- **Depending** if someone had a daughter or son;
- **Depending** on the socio economic status a person is in;
- **Depending on which side of the law** that someone has found themselves on;

- **I would imagine that there were some** who may have been indifferent to this news of Herod's plot;
- **I would imagine that there were** some who may not have been fully aware of what was going on;
- But the reality in my mind is the fact that something like this **was going on**; everybody should have been alarmed;
- **Everybody should have been insistent** to put an end to this terrible madness;
- And yet it still happened;
- In fact injustices like this keeps happening!
- Highlighting the fact that they needed a Savior then;
- We need a Savior now;
- Because the indifference is problematic;
- The lack of awareness is sobering;
- The fact that history keeps repeating itself as it pertains to oppression, marginalization and more is disgusting;
- So church we do need a Savior;
- A Savior from some of our mindsets;

- A Savior because of some of our indifference;
- The birth of Jesus was necessary because it was time for God to make known to the world that something somewhere, somehow has gone terribly wrong inside the hearts and minds of humanity;
- For it has never been by God's design for corruptness to become our accepted norm;
- For marginalization to become part of our core values;
- For greed to become our mission;
- No, no, church we need a Savior
- To help us to be awakened to the fact that if Herod is coming for our neighbors baby, then in effect Herod is coming for all of our babies;
- To teach us that our concern for others should be just as strong as it is for ourselves;
- Because the awakening I am shifting into is that everything we endure individually will inevitably impact all of us;

- The level of interconnectedness and degrees of separation is closer than we might think;
- Just as the note on the drivers side mirror notifies us that “objects may be closer than they seem”;
- This church is the impact on the world when we do not have ministries that reflect the mission of forgiveness to the captives; recovery of sight to the blind; setting free the oppressed;
- The ramifications of not being spiritually awakened to these systemic issues greatly impacts the world as a whole;
- So praise God for the Savior;
- Thank God for The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord....

10

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.

11

May all kings fall down before him,

all nations give him service.

12

For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.

13

He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.

14

From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight. (Psalm
72:10-14)

• Let the Church Say Amen!