

Matthew 2:1-12  
January 2, '11

“WHAT’S NEW?”

*“WHY ARE ALL THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS STILL UP HERE AT CHURCH & WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT A CHRISTMAS PASSAGE TODAY WHEN CHRISTMAS WAS MORE THAN A WEEK AGO?”*

EACH OF THOSE QUESTIONS WAS ON THE MINDS OF SOME OF YOU THIS MORNING & BOTH OF THOSE QUESTIONS WAS ON THE MINDS OF A FEW OF YOU.

THERE ARE LOGICAL ANSWERS TO BOTH QUESTIONS.

OUR CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS ARE STILL UP BECAUSE WE ARE STILL IN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

WE HAD THE ADVENT SEASON THAT PREPARED US FOR CHRISTMAS & NOW WE HAVE THE CHRISTMAS SEASON THAT ACKNOWLEDGES THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ADVENT PROMISES.

THAT WOULD SEEM TO ANSWER THE SECOND QUESTION – *“WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT A CHRISTMAS PASSAGE TODAY WHEN CHRISTMAS WAS MORE THAN A WEEK AGO?”*

YES, IT WOULD *SEEM* TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION BUT IT DOESN'T.

IT DOESN'T ANSWER IT BECAUSE THIS PASSAGE ISN'T A CHRISTMAS PASSAGE.

IT'S AN EPIPHANY PASSAGE & BY THE TIME WE MEET AGAIN, THE EPIPHANY SEASON WILL BE HERE.

EPIPHANY IS THIS THURSDAY, JANUARY 6.

WE GO FROM ADVENT TO CHRISTMAS TO EPIPHANY IS LESS THAN 2 WEEKS.

YOU KNOW WHAT EPIPHANY IS IN OUR MODERN USAGE.

IT'S THE “AHA!” MOMENTS OF LIFE – THOSE TIMES WHEN SOMETHING YOU PREVIOUSLY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, MYSTERIOUSLY DAWNS ON YOU FOR THE FIRST TIME & IS MADE CLEAR.

THAT'S A PRETTY ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THE SEASON OF EPIPHANY CELEBRATES.

IT'S THE OBSERVANCE OF THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN TO THE CHRIST CHILD.

IT REPRESENTS THE DAWNING OF SOMETHING BRAND-NEW ON ALL OF HUMANITY – THE KNOWLEDGE THAT CHRIST CAME – NOT JUST FOR THE JEWS – BUT FOR EVERYONE.

WE CAN GO BACK TO THE *“FOUR LITTLE WORDS”* THAT WE TALKED ABOUT ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

WHEN THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE TO THE SHEPHERDS OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE ANGEL SAID IT WAS *“GOOD NEWS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE.”*

THE GOOD NEWS IS FOR EVERYONE – JEW & GENTILE ALIKE.

IT TOOK SOME TIME, THOUGH, FOR THIS REALIZATION TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

IN FACT, WE'RE STILL – 2,000 YEARS LATER – TRYING TO UNDERSTAND IT.

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO SAY THAT THE GOOD NEWS IS *“FOR ALL THE PEOPLE?”*

WHAT DOES THE “GOOD NEWS” MEAN FOR YOU?

WHAT WILL THAT GOOD NEWS MEAN IN THE YEAR AHEAD & HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU TO LIVE WITH THAT EPIPHANY – THAT “AHA!” UNDERSTANDING THAT CHRIST HAS BEEN BORN “FOR YOU.”

THESE ARE BIG QUESTIONS – THEY'RE SERIOUS QUESTIONS – THEY'RE QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ANSWERED.

SO OFTEN WE ASK QUESTIONS WITHOUT REALLY EXPECTING AN ANSWER.

WE CALL THEM RHETORICAL QUESTIONS & SOME QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD – OR COULD – BE CONSIDERED SERIOUS QUESTIONS END UP BEING PERCEIVED AS RHETORICAL.

SOME OF THOSE QUESTIONS ARE REALLY SIMPLY A WAY OF GREETING ONE ANOTHER.

WHEN WE ENCOUNTER SOMEONE & ASK, “*HOW YA' DOIN'?*,” MORE OFTEN THAN NOT WE DON'T REALLY EXPECT AN HONEST ANSWER.

ANOTHER QUESTION WE OFTEN ASK THAT IS LITTLE MORE THAN A GREETING IS, “*WHAT'S NEW?*”

THE QUESTION IS USUALLY ASKED SOMEWHAT FLIPPANTLY & THE RESPONSE IS AS WELL.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WHEN ASKED THAT QUESTION, DON'T YOU SAY SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF “*NOTHING MUCH*” OR “*SAME OLD – SAME OLD*” OR SOMETHING AKIN TO THAT?

INTERESTINGLY, NOW IS THE TIME OF YEAR – PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER - WHEN THAT QUESTION COULD BE ANSWERED WITH A WHOLE SERIES OF RESPONSES.

WE'RE JUST A WEEK REMOVED FROM CHRISTMAS.

“*WHAT'S NEW?*” CAN BE ANSWERED WITH A LIST OF THE CHRISTMAS GIFTS YOU RECEIVED – OR GAVE.

THE CLOTHES, BOOKS, TOOLS, JEWELRY, GADGETS & TOYS ARE ALL BRAND NEW!

THEY'RE FRESH & EXCITING & WAITING TO BE PUT TO USE.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE THAT'S NEW AT THIS TIME OF YEAR – SOMETHING THAT'S ALSO FRESH & EXCITING & WAITING TO BE PUT TO USE.

WE STAND AT THE VERY THRESHHOLD OF NEWNESS TODAY.

WE'RE NEAR THE BEGINNING OF A NEW DAY, A NEW WEEK, A NEW MONTH, A NEW YEAR & EVEN A NEW DECADE.

YESTERDAY WAS EXCITING FOR THOSE WHO ARE FASCINATED BY NUMBERS.

IT PROVIDED NUMBERS THAT NONE OF US HERE HAS EVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE & MORE THAN LIKELY NEVER WILL EXPERIENCE AGAIN.

1-1-11.

I FOUND THAT I JUST WANTED TO DATE SOMETHING YESTERDAY SO I COULD WRITE THAT DOWN!

BUT, YOU KNOW, IN REALITY, EACH & EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES IS LIKE THAT.

EVERY DAY – JANUARY SECOND, 2011 – WILL NEVER BE EXPERIENCED AGAIN!

WHAT'S NEW?

TODAY. TODAY IS NEW.

IT'S FRESH, EXCITING & JUST WAITING TO BE PUT TO USE.

WE DON'T ORDINARILY LOOK AT NEW DAYS LIKE THAT, THOUGH.

WE'RE MORE INCLINED TO HAVE MINIMAL EXPECTATIONS THAT ANYTHING FRESH & EXCITING WILL HAPPEN TO US ON A NEW DAY.

THE "NOTHIN' MUCH" & "SAME OLD – SAME OLD" RESPONSE TO THE "WHAT'S NEW?" QUESTION IS OUR OWN FAULT, THOUGH, ISN'T IT?

JUST AS THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE FASCINATED BY NUMBERS, THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO ARE FASCINATED BY WORDS.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT HOW CLOSE THE WORD "CHANGE" IS TO THE WORD "CHANCE?" IT'S NOT JUST THE FACT THAT IF YOU REPLACE ONE LETTER WITH ANOTHER YOU GET A NEW WORD. IT'S ALSO HOW CLOSELY THOSE LETTERS RESEMBLE ONE ANOTHER.

A SIMPLE LINE IN A "C" MAKES IT A "G."

"CHANCE" BECOMES "CHANGE."

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A CHANGE, YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE A CHANCE.

THAT'S HARD TO DO, THOUGH, SIMPLY BECAUSE IT'S SO EASY *NOT* TO.

IT'S SO EASY TO KEEP LIVING THE WAY WE'VE ALWAYS LIVED, THINKING THE THOUGHTS WE'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT & DOING THINGS THE WAY WE'VE ALWAYS DONE THEM.

IT WAS IN THE MIDST OF HIS GREAT ESSAY ON "SELF-RELIANCE" THAT EMERSON GAVE US THAT GREAT LINE "*A FOOLISH CONSISTENCY IS THE HOBGOBLIN OF LITTLE MINDS.*"

THIS YEAR, WHY NOT TRY SOMETHING NEW IN LIFE?

WHY NOT TAKE A CHANCE TO MAKE A CHANGE?

LOOK AT THE STORY OF THE WISE MEN THAT WE READ THIS MORNING.

THEY WERE, NO DOUBT, ACCUSTOMED TO GOING ABOUT THEIR DAILY TASKS ON A ROUTINE BASIS.

I'M SURE THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THEY SAW THINGS UNUSUAL IN THE SKY.

BUT ONE DAY, ONE OF THEM SAW SOMETHING THAT MADE HIM DECIDE TO TAKE A CHANCE.

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE CONVERSATION THAT MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE WEEKLY WISE MAN MEETING?

*"GUYS, YOU KNOW THAT UNUSUALLY BRIGHT STAR WE SAW THE OTHER NIGHT? I THINK WE OUGHT TO FOLLOW IT."*

*"WHAT ARE YOU – NUTS? WHAT SENSE WOULD IT MAKE TO FOLLOW A STAR?"*

*"YEAH, I'M AFRAID I'M WITH HIM. IT SEEMS A BIT RISKY TO JUST HEAD OUT FOR WHO KNOWS WHERE TO FOLLOW A STAR. ISN'T THAT A BIT LIKE LOOKING FOR A POT OF GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW?!"*

THAT FIRST WISE MAN PREVAILED, THOUGH, DIDN'T HE?

HE CONVINCED THE OTHERS THAT THEY SHOULD TAKE A CHANCE & MAKE A CHANGE.

THAT'S LITTLE MORE THAN FANCIFUL SPECULATION, OF COURSE, NOT ONLY ABOUT WHAT MAY HAVE HAPPENED BUT EVEN ABOUT HOW MANY WISE MEN THERE WERE BECAUSE WE SIMPLY DON'T KNOW THE ANSWERS TO ANY OF THE QUESTIONS THIS ENTIRE EPISODE RAISES.

WE DO KNOW, THOUGH, THAT FOR WHATEVER REASON IT WAS, THESE MEN TOOK A CHANCE ON SOMETHING.

THEY TOOK A CHANCE & THEY MADE A CHANGE & BECAUSE THEY DID, THEY EXPERIENCED AN EPIPHANY – AN “AHA!” MOMENT THAT WOULD SURELY TRANSFORM THEIR LIVES.

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A CHANGE, YOU’VE GOT TO TAKE A CHANCE.

WHY NOT DO SO THIS YEAR?

RIGHT NOW – THE SECOND DAY OF JANUARY – IS A GOOD TIME TO MAKE THAT COMMITMENT.

IF YOU KNOW THE SONG “SEASONS OF LOVE” YOU KNOW THAT WE STILL HAVE MORE THAN 523,000 MINUTES REMAINING IN THE YEAR 2011.

WHY NOT DECIDE TODAY THAT YOU’RE GOING TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO BE ABLE TO OFFER A REAL ANSWER WHEN SOMEONE ASKS YOU “WHAT’S NEW?”

DON’T SETTLE FOR “NOTHING MUCH” OR “SAME OLD – SAME OLD.”

I TALKED TO SOMEONE RECENTLY WHO TOLD ME THEY WERE GOING TO BUY AN INSTRUMENT THIS YEAR & LEARN HOW TO PLAY IT.

THIS WASN’T A CHILD OR A TEEN-AGER.

THIS WAS A PERSON WELL INTO THEIR 50’S WHO HAS DECIDED TO TAKE A CHANCE & MAKE A CHANGE.

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO YOURSELF THAT AT THE END OF THIS YEAR, WHEN SOMEONE ASKS YOU THAT QUESTION WE ARE SO OFTEN ASKED, YOU’LL BE ABLE TO SAY, “WHAT’S NEW? LET ME TELL YOU WHAT’S NEW!”  
AMEN.

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