

# The St. John's Pulpit

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## LOOKING FOR JESUS

Matthew 2:1-15

Season of Christmas, January 1, 2017  
The Rev. Dennis W. Foust, PhD, Senior Minister



Meghan is bothered by Christmas. She is a beginning to own her faith as a young adult and differentiating between essence, substance and pretense. She is bothered by people celebrating the secular dimensions of Christmas with tremendous energy while throwing in a pinch of Jesus for a little sacred flavor. Meghan says, “We feel religious because we mention Jesus; we like Jesus in the manger though, where he can do us no harm. In the manger, Jesus is a gift to enjoy, a baby to hold; one who does not threaten us with a call to take up our cross of discipleship or to come and die.” Meghan’s sincerity reminds us that in each human heart, there is a Bethlehem where we must decide whether we will make room or not for God to birth something new in us.

Today is the eighth day of Christmas. I called to request eight maids to bring their milk cows and line up across the front of the sanctuary today. But, their agent said New Year’s Day is a holiday in their contract. (Thank you for smiling at my terrible attempt at humor.)

This Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, the twelve-day season of Christmas ends. The season of Epiphany begins on January 6th. Theologically, Epiphany means, ‘*the manifestation or revelation of making real a divine being.*’ Usually, when someone says, “I had an epiphany,” they eliminate God describing, ‘an ‘aha moment; or a sudden realization of significance; or an internal awareness of an eternal value or truth.’ However, the true meaning of ‘Epiphany’ involves a revelation from the Living God; not merely an ‘aha moment originating within us.

During the season of Epiphany, the adult Jesus appears. He is baptized and affirmed by a voice from the heavens. He enters the wilderness to be tempted and begins with a miracle at a wedding. During Epiphany, we remember what Jesus revealed to the world about the character and vision of God. During Epiphany, we remember how God’s light in Jesus guides us to experience God’s love. During Epiphany, we proclaim how Jesus awakens us to the nature of God and to the will of God.

Yet, today, we are still celebrating Christmas. A great deal happens before Jesus’ baptism: Jesus is presented in the Temple; the holy family flees to Egypt; and a twelve-year old Jesus announces he must be about his Father’s business. **On this eighth day of Christmas, we have the Christmas story of the Magi from Persia travelling west looking for a king. They didn’t realize it, but they were looking for Jesus. They were not the first people to be looking for Jesus – and people are still looking for Jesus today.**

For several centuries, prophetic voices told people to look for a messiah – meaning a savior or a deliverer. Most people were looking for a political answer to their problems. Yet, the prophets proclaimed a spiritual messiah. Micah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah and others foresaw a time when God would send a savior to begin a new day. This savior would be a New Light in the world and would bring light for all people groups. This chosen one, this Christened one, this messiah would bring hope, salvation, healing, justice, reconciliation and peace.

A literary prophet of the past century, CS Lewis, wrote in *Chronicles of Narnia*:

“Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight;  
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more;  
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death;  
And, when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.”

Like those who listened to the prophets of centuries ago, we join with the poet Christina Rossetti who gave us the phrase, “*In the bleak mid-winter.*” Each of you walks through seasons of life best described as ‘bleak mid-winter.’ During those days, you listen to the prophets who foretell a new light.

In the bleak mid-winter, you search for a bright star;  
For in that brilliance, you are able to see who you really are.  
In the bleak mid-winter, you listen to hear a baby cry;  
For in that sound your hopes rebound emerging as a smile.  
In the bleak mid-winter, you listen to hear a baby coo;  
For in the midst of your busy-ness, you need meaning in what you do.

Throughout history, people have been looking for Jesus. Most have not known the name of Jesus. They are like the Wise Men from Persia, following a sense or a sign or a hint that something divine was taking place and they wanted in on it.

One young man in India decided to follow Jesus after he read the early verses of the first chapter in Matthew’s Gospel. Listed there are 42 names presenting Jesus’ genealogy, beginning with, “*Abraham begat Isaac.*” The young man explained, he had been looking for Jesus because he wanted a spiritual leader whose teachings and life were based in history, not merely mystery.

People look for Jesus for many reasons. Some look for Jesus the way King Herod looked for Jesus. They seek to destroy anyone who threatens their power and control. You probably know of people who work against God.

Some look for Jesus the way Joseph and Mary looked for Jesus when he was twelve years of age. They look for Jesus because while they were not paying attention along their journey, they left Jesus behind. They turned and found Jesus in the place of worship and spiritual learning. Even with all of our faults, people still find Jesus in places of worship and spiritual learning.

Some look for Jesus the way Martin Luther looked for Jesus. Tired of going through empty motions of religious life, he looked for Jesus as God's salvation offering a vision of God's justice. He called his relationship of commitment with Jesus, "a wedding ring of faith."

Some look for Jesus the way Claude Broach looked for Jesus. He looked for Jesus on the borders of difference. He invested his life in racial integration and expanding opportunities for the disadvantaged. He saw the poor as people to be served rather than objects to be avoided. He invested his life in creating understanding between people of diverse faith traditions.

Some look for Jesus the way Anne Lamott looks for Jesus. She became aware of her need to care about other people as a way of not being so focused on herself and she found Jesus to be the one who could teach her to live that life.

My pastoral prayer for you, St. John's, as we enter 2017, is that you will be looking for Jesus in deeper ways this year. As a Servant Church, most of you are already involved in one or more pathways of service in our community and world through St. John's. In our 2020 Ministry Vision Plan, we have a goal of involving every member in service. So, this morning I am commissioning our Deacons and our Sunday School Leadership to work with our Mission Resource Team in an organized effort that I am naming **MT25**. This will involve a checklist so make yourself ready.

**MT25** is an abbreviation for Matthew 25 where Jesus' words are recorded: "*I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me.*" We have grouped our mission opportunities into pathways that guide you as you are 'Looking for Jesus' in metro Charlotte and beyond. You can serve Jesus in one of several areas: Children and Families, Community Development, Education, Healthcare, Homelessness, and Hunger. Each opportunity involves peace-building.

Some of you may be involved in an area of service because the compassion of God within you calls you to that need. For example, your spiritual life may be enriched because you know you are responding to God's calling in your life as you serve persons who need shelter. Yet, some of you are responding to God's calling in another way. And some of you merely want to be involved in mentoring youth or reading to children. **MT25** will help you in looking for Jesus.

So, today, as we transition from Christmas toward Epiphany. I remind you of the words written by Howard Thurman, in his litany, "*Now the Work of Christmas Begins.*"

"When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins: to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people, to make music in the heart."

Amen and AMEN!