

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Michael Bird Transcript**

"A Story of Upending"

"The story of the wise ones is a story of upending. They did not deposit their gifts to the king; they bypassed the empire and made their way to the sleepy place where the child was and offered him their gifts," said the Rev. Michael A. Bird in today's Christmastide sermon.

The child born in a stable in Bethlehem is calling to us. If you dare to take the next step on your journey, what gifts will you offer at his feet? How will you be changed?

The readings are Jeremiah 31:7–14; Psalm 84; Ephesians 1:3–6, 15–19a; and Matthew 2:1–12.

Sermon Transcript:

In keeping with the theme that this is one of the weirdest Sundays that the Church can provide. I thought I'd preach from out here for a change. This is the Second Sunday after Christmas. It's also faux Epiphany because we just can't quite hold off till January 6th. It is the Sunday of the incredible obstacle course that is doing anything up here in the crossing. It is all of these things wrapped into one, with one of the greatest stories that we have from the Gospel of Matthew that points us to the truth and possibility, the reality that is the light of Jesus Christ. So here I find myself protecting our Epiphany street cred by standing between the wise ones who were trying to make their way to Bethlehem, but not letting them get there until Thursday. If you at all know a bit of Trinity's history or practice, you'll know that this group of four have been making their way around the church since Christmas Eve. We fast forwarded them to the front for today. We have this moment where standing in this space that we all stand in, we recognize that this story of the wise ones, connected deeply to the story of the infant born in Bethlehem, is a story of upending. The wise ones traveled with gold, frankincense, and myrrh from wherever they started, Persia or Babylon or somewhere else, and they made their way to Bethlehem. And on the way they stopped at the king's house, the house of King Herod, and there they did not deposit their gifts.

Instead, they bypassed the king, they bypassed the empire, and they made their way to that sleepy little place where a child was, and they offered him their gifts. This is a story of upending, where we think the power is, is the powerlessness. The death throes of empire that can have no life in the Kingdom of God. And where we find power is in the self offering of our God to be one of us with us in the most vulnerable way possible. This is a story of upending, but it's also a story that has a bunch of other parts to it. In some places, not here at Trinity, but in some places, the Feast of the Epiphany is a much bigger deal than Christmas. If we were to find ourselves in Mexico later this week, we'd see a bunch of shoes left out with hay in them so that the camels could be fed and the kings might leave presents for the children. If we were in Ethiopia, we'd be encountering a two-day festival that actually is focused on the baptism of Jesus and not on this moment and yet is still part of the Epiphany, part of the revealing of God's love and light in the world. But in the context of upending and in the context of the lines that we had today

from Psalm 84, "Happy are the people whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on the pilgrim's way." I'd like us to think about journey on this faux Feast of the Epiphany. One of my favorite moments in Richard Rohr's *Everything Belongs* is when he lifts up this little piece of trivia. He notes that on many medieval maps, when you got to the edge of civilization, right when land ended and ocean began, there was penciled in on the edge, on the side, "Here may be dragons." It's sort of comforting really because there's a whole lot of risk in taking a journey and why not find a great excuse not to do that? There might be dragons! We'll just pause on that for a minute. At the same time, knowing this reticence to take the risk of going on journeys, knowing our deep love of comfort and being where we are, when we are, we also have the story of these Magi. One of the great poems about the journey of the Magi, not shockingly called *Journey of the Magi* was written by T.S. Eliot. And Eliot took the beginning of his poem, took that text from a Christmas Day sermon preached by Lancelot Andrewes for King James the First in 1622.

Now, there is some cocktail party factoids for you, all in one little bit. In Eliot's poem, we have this moment where these Magi are struggling. They committed to this journey. It begins, a cold coming we had of it, just the worst time of the year for a journey and such a long journey. The way is deep and the weather sharp, the very dead of winter. And the poem goes on. And the villages dirty and charging high prices. A hard time we had of it. At the end, we preferred to travel all night, sleeping in snatches with the voices singing in our ears, saying that this was all folly. In Eliot's poem, and Rohr's analogy of that medieval map, we recognize that very human thing in us, which is the fear of taking the next step. The fear of taking a step that makes us more vulnerable. The fear of taking the next step that reveals who we are and how we are, and how we navigate the world. But the truth on this day is that we are in fact, being invited to embark on a journey, that the child born in a stable in Bethlehem is calling to us, each and every one of us, is asking us to come to Him that we might know life and the light of the world. So on this day, we're presented with an option. We can keep this beautiful pageant scene right here and box it up and keep it safe and still and detached. Or we can put ourselves right in the middle of it. We can dare to take the next step on our journey to Christ and dare to wonder what will come of it. What gifts will well up in us? What gifts will we want to offer at the feet of the child? How will we be changed if having taken this journey together? We, like the Magi, find it's time to leave by another way. Because our hearts are open, our spirits are filled, our souls are on fire with the love of God, and the call for our journey to begin here and take us out there, where the need is great. May our faux Epiphany lead us to true journey.

Amen.