

Matthew 2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

There is a certain comfort in being in this "in between time" of Christmas and New Year. For pastors, many take this week off. The busyness of December needs a reprieve. I understand that. The rest others need this week equally applies to pastors. Congregations likewise may feel stretched by annual meetings, budgets, programs for 2018, new council members, building needs, and a host of things—*often little things*—that demand attention. It cries for a little peace.

Rest is a place we associate with quiet and well-being. It is peace and a time away from the norm. Yet, as a gathering we equally need rest. That rest is at worship. It is a time to engage that part of the nativity where Luke writes "...and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" *Peace is part of the mystery of the season*. It is in Christ taking our humanity. It is in the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is in our "sharing of the peace" each Sunday and understanding ALL our conversations and actions (in the church and out) represent Christ. Peace is a reflection of God's wish for our lives. That which we fear, those things that burden us, all that prevents a relationship with God and others must enter into the "peace that passes all understanding."

That says that when we are not at peace, then we do not reside in Christ. Our actions bring the chaos which is part of sin. I spoke with a pastor who is helping in a congregation that has faced internal division. He noted how difficult it is to remind and draw people to God's peace. The church I attended before Seminary had one person who always found some issue. For example, the organist didn't play "Silent Night" correctly. They disliked the church leadership. It seemed that they took delight in turmoil of every sort. Tough to understand, isn't it? They brought strife that eventually involved the synod. That was sad! This one person had such certainty that they hurt others for their own sense of wellbeing. They were not agents of peace. Then again, the church is made up of sinners. We will not always show our best qualities. How can these things be avoided?

I have faced many times strife between spouses or neighbors or even people coming to Peter's Porch. What it precipitates is the hurt the person picks up from their tormentor's behavior. Emotions are contagious. Anger brings an angry response. Our grief causes others to feel sadness. The effect is WE become the person who has hurt us. We become them. How odd. We become the person WHO destroyed our peace. My counsel is to avoid that trap. Don't become the person who has hurt you.

Oh, I know that is difficult. Yet, I know too well how one person can make you feel miserable. My sense is they want company. In their misery, they invite us into their darkness. It may be difficult, but I prefer to offer joy. I prefer to show life. I prefer to think by God's grace and mercy that I am able to show the child whose star gave light to a dark world. I prefer to be an agent of peace and understanding. Yes, I may brood over slights and meanness because I'm human. Yet, I work to avoid their behavior because that is not "sharing of the peace" I wish to offer others.

May you know peace this year...so with Happy New Year, I also say Peace-filled New Year. May we be agents of Christ in a troubled world—a homage better than gold, frankincense and myrrh.

With blessing...*Pastor Joe*