**Come and See**

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Cor.1: 1-9; John 1:29-42

 Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year A, January 15, 2023

St. Matthew’s, Sunbury

The Rev. Dina Carter Ishler, Deacon in Charge

***In the name of the One who is Life Abundant,***

***Love Overflowing, and Spirit Out-Pouring, Amen.***

I always think that it is such a privilege to share a sermon with a community, and never more so than this morning, when it is the very first time we will wonder together about the stories that today’s Collect and scripture readings tell us. As faithful pilgrims on the Way of Love, we have gathered here to imagine how the wisdom of holy scripture may be increasingly alive and real to us, as people who live and move and have our being in this particular place and time. When we tell and retell these stories of long ago with their well-known scenery and characters, their gifts and revelations, we are finding ourselves and our own stories in them- remembering together all God’s promises, all God’s longing for us to be God’s people. Because of the truth of what we know- because what scripture has taught us in the past has already begun to come true- because of what has been and what ***is*** right here and right now- we look with expectancy and hope towards the fullness of all that is yet to be. Which is just as it should be in this new season of doing life together, when we are just beginning to tell each other the stories that really matter.

In the seasons of Christmastide and Epiphanytide we re-tell some of our most beloved stories in deeply familiar language, the ones that have captured our imagination since we were children and never cease to fill us with amazement and wonder. You know the ones I mean, the ones where you can close your eyes and see all the images - stories of shepherds and sleepy animals in a stable and a newborn baby in a feeding trough, of the blazing brightness of the glory of God against the quiet darkness of the desert night and the angelic proclamation that this light brings not fear, but the very deepest kind of joy. Of how the shepherds ‘go with haste’ and find this Child of whom the angel had told them and his human, awestruck parents, of how what they see so transforms them that they must tell everyone about it, glorifying and giving praise to God. Of how the Magi, those wise and discerning travelers from a faraway land, are so pulled by the rising of that glorious Star that they set out on own their pilgrimage to find the Child, allowing their joy to so overwhelm them that they are changed forever and must go home by another way. These are all stories of how we will never be the same because the Word has become flesh and lives among us and we have seen his glory, as the Gospel writer known as John says- they are testimonies that all who see him and know him, who are faithful to their longing to come into his presence are not only transformed themselves, but called to share this transformation with a world hungry for healing and wholeness.

In today’s Gospel, the story reminds us that how we see and encounter God and share our experience with others is the lifeforce that brings others to their own seeing and sharing. John the Baptizer dramatically witnesses to the power of what he had seen with his own eyes: “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him…and I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” Two of his disciples hear this, hear him call Jesus the ‘Lamb of God’ who will take away the brokenness of sin in this world and they follow Jesus so that they might dwell with him, remain in his presence, longing to receive what he will offer them. This pattern of witnessing will continue: Andrew, one of these two disciples, will find his brother Simon and bring him to Jesus; Simon himself will be so changed that he will embrace a new name and despite his very human failings and doubts become the Rock upon whom the church will be built. In the Gospel of John this thread is woven into the stories that are to come- in the verses immediately following these, Philip will testify to Nathaniel using the same words as Jesus did: ***“Come and see.”*** In a few weeks, we will hear the Samaritan woman say the same thing to the people of her city after her encounter with Jesus at the well: “***Come and see***- he cannot be the Messiah…or can he?” Mary Magdalene will know the risen Jesus because he calls her by name, go and announce to the disciples “I have seen the Lord!” and share the things that he tells her so that they too may come to believe. And when we ourselves have an experience with God made known to us through the life and love and teachings of Jesus, we too are so changed that we are compelled to find others and say to them: “In the eyes of our children- in the love I receive and the love I give away- in the Body and Blood of Christ given for me in the Eucharist- in the promise of life everlasting- I have seen and known God, and so can you.” As faithful disciples, this is our truest work- to shape our lives and tell our stories so that they point always to Jesus, to declare with passion and conviction: “I have found the One who is the true Light, who takes away our separation from each other and from God- ***I want to share this with you-*** ***come and see***.”

I **know** that you know this… but it is not always easy, and not because we do not believe that we are called to live this way. We know that we have been chosen by God, as Isaiah tells us, that we are to be as a light to the nations so that God’s salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. We speak, as the psalmist does, of God’s faithfulness and deliverance, God’s righteousness not hidden and God’s love not concealed. We hear from the apostle Paul that we are all God’s holy people, “together with those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”, strengthened and grace-filled and lacking for nothing. These words are all beautiful and true and we have them to rely on- but that does not mean this work of sharing what we have seen and known is going to be easy- in part because it is so simple for us to forget the joy and wonder we feel when we know without a doubt that what we have experienced in every fiber of our being is of God. In order to ‘see and show and share’ as we’ve been called to do, we must keep our openness and our amazement alive, to protect them from being beaten down by the world, to invite them to constantly be transforming us. ***We cannot possibly beckon others towards transformation if it is not real in our own lives***.

After all, whenever we see something wonderful we want to share our experience with others. “Come and see- you don’t want to miss it!” we shout when we see a bald eagle sailing over our heads, or when the first snowflakes of the winter are falling. We join others at the water’s edge to watch the sun rise and set over the ocean. Children tug on our hands when something amazes them so that we will look down into the awe and excitement on their faces and share their joy and wonder with them. What if WE did that with our own lived experiences of God as made known through the saving and forgiving presence of Jesus? Can we help each other to be present to even life’s most everyday moments so we might see where God is showing up and share these stories with each other? Can we allow the gratitude we see on a diaper bank or a food pantry morning, the fun our cub scouts have when they gather in our hall, the loveliness of our beloved building, the gladness we feel when we worship together to continue to change us and keep us open to God’s presence among us? So often, it is the ordinary moments that happen when we do life together that have such potential to transform us- but we must be paying attention if we are to receive them as gift.

 And so, beloveds, I invite us to hang onto our Christmas Eve sense of joy and wonder as the stories continue to unfold- to be amazed as our own stories unfold. Our longing to see with our own eyes will guide us, like the Magi, on our life’s journeys so we too might see God as revealed to us in ways we cannot yet imagine- ***after all, they saw the star because they had been looking for it.*** We who have seen the brightness of the true Light have been called to make the fullness of God’s love and longing known. Here at St. Matthew’s, let us believe with all our being that God has and will always do a new thing among us and that we are the ones who will see it and then share it with our world. ***Amen.***