

“A Generation of Seekers”

Matthew 2.1–12

The Rev. Hal Chorpensing, Plymouth Cong'l UCC, 8 Jan 2006

Contrary to popular belief, the magi weren't regarded as the “good guys” by the people around Jesus. After all, they were a group of wandering Gentiles. Nothing in the story says anything at all about kingship – that's part of the lore that's grown up around these three enigmatic figures over the millennia. These three sages from the east were not supposed to be the ones who “got it,” who knew that Jesus was, in fact, the messiah.

Now, you know this story. You've heard it year after year. You probably even know the names of the three magi. Anyone here remember any of them? [response] I hate to disappoint you, but you didn't hear that in the reading from Matthew's gospel this morning, and that's the only place in the Bible these three sages are mentioned.

Another extracanonical tradition reports that one of the wise men actually returned to Egypt, where he helped found the Coptic church. Have you ever wondered what happened to these three travelers after they left Bethlehem, and “returned to their own country by a smaller road”?

Think about that, if you will. Imagine that you are one of these three astrologers. You've made this incredibly arduous journey. You've brought the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You've seen the face of God in the baby Jesus. . . . And now you're supposed to turn around, go home, and pick up life as usual? Seeing Jesus is a life-changing experience. What if you returned home and nobody believed you? What if you came back from your travels and couldn't ever quite practice your religion in quite the same way? What if your seeking never stopped? What if you went on other journeys? Over the years, what if you returned to Judea and encountered Jesus as a young man or as a young adult? Would you become a follower of the son, rather than a star?

We are so much like those wise men in many ways. I imagine that many of us here have considered ourselves *seekers* at one time or another. Actually, I hope that each of us continues to consider ourselves to be seeking, on a pilgrimage, on a journey of faith. That's the only way I know that our faith can grow.

Wade Clark Roof is one of the best-known sociologists of religion (and I have to mention that he teaches at my alma mater, UC Santa Barbara, which has a great religious studies program). Roof wrote a book about a dozen years ago called *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*.¹ How many of you are baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964)? And how many of us have sought another faith tradition or denomination, other than the one into which we were born? And for all of us here, how many of us consider ourselves seekers of one kind or another, even if it's exploring new ways of looking at the divine within our own context?

Perhaps those three sages from the east also were part of a generation of seekers, who went on a journey in search of spiritual truth and enlightenment, to search for ultimate meaning. Pilgrimage has a long tradition in the UCC, and that's something we should never lose sight of, especially in a church that's called *Plymouth*.

May your journey enrich you and those whose lives you touch and may our common journey together change the world in positive ways, whether great or small.

To close this sermon, I'd like to invite Sharon Smith (chair of our CC prayer team) / Dianne Stober (who is on our CC leadership gifts team) to join us for a three-part Epiphany

¹ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*. (SF: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993)

reading. This was written by David Butler, who is minister of First Parish Congregational Church of Gorham, Maine.