



At a Distance for Epiphany 1 2021  
Celebration of New Ministry and The Baptism of Jesus  
“Fresh Sprouts”



Mark 1: 4-11

Greetings Saints and on behalf of Mona and myself and our worship team today: Dick Woods, Martha Stephenson, Carol Burckhardt and Donna Greene, we would like to welcome you again to All Saints Episcopal Church here in Vancouver Washington. You are a blessing to us and the diversity, energy and spirit that you bring to our Community of Faith and to Our Circle is a true gift. We are grateful and we thank you.

It has been quite a week Blessed Ones. A week of challenge for those of us walking the Jesus Way. A week of challenge for us Wisdom Keepers following the Christmas Star to live into our call

to Shine, Brighten, and Lead. A challenge to recognize and nurture the Divine Spark within us all. This week was a challenge to be a "God Birther." The images of last week's assault on our fragile union, our republic, our democracy will regrettably remain with us always. We will remember where we were on January 6, 2021. Like we remember where we were when President Kennedy was shot; when the Twin Towers were attacked on 9/11; when the Challenger exploded. All dates and times seared into our consciousness like a cattle brand. Last Wednesday we faced images of anger, images of attempts to destroy things both seen and unseen...the destruction of sacred places and the destruction sacred ideas...like, "One Nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Saints, last Wednesday's hard images and spiritual and ethical challenges came in stark juxtaposition to our conversations last Sunday about the "hidden" gifts brought by the Wisdom Keepers that Epiphany. Their yearning to connect with Creator; their patience; their tenacity of vision and their listening to messages from unlikely deliverers. Wisdom...the sacred wrapping of knowledge and experience in the Love of God catalyzed and delivered by the Sacred Spirit. We are tested every day aren't we Saints...to simply "do the next right thing." To work and love our way through the day, decision by decision. A normal day

challenges us as we attempt to Walk the Jesus Way. January 6<sup>th</sup> challenges us mightily...what are we to do?

As I watched last Wednesday, other images immediately came to mind. Wildfire! We Westerners know all too well the power, and destructive force the wildfire carries. Mona and I have vivid memories of the assault of several wildfires on our homes in Montana. We stood in on our back porch and watched as the Canyon Ferry Lake Fire crept closer and closer to our homes in the Helena Valley. We saw the crimson red of the aerial fire retardant dropped 150 yards from our home during the Scratch Gravel Hill Fire. And we remember our beloved Yellowstone ablaze, and the Gorge ablaze, and western Washington and Oregon ablaze just last summer; consuming, relentless devastation. Fuel, a source of ignition and oxygen and the beast is awakened. So too, last Wednesday Saints. What are we to do?

The Season of Epiphany which we celebrate today, which began ironically last Wednesday... is 6 Sundays of "finding Joy," celebrating the Light and Brightness of the Jesus Way. The Advent waiting and preparation are over. Our yearning to be with the Sacred Child is fulfilled and now together with Jesus we are baptized in the light and in the water and together we walk with our Sacred Teacher and Incarnation.

The Light that we were expecting last Wednesday, the Light of Christ, the manifestation of the Christmas Star was anything *but*. It was the light from the wildfire, burning fast, burning furiously, intense but blessedly short-lived. Not the life-giving light of the Epiphany that we were expecting, but the life-taking light of the wildfire fueled by words of hatred and ignited by calls to combat. And in it's wake our sacred ground lay smoldering. Our Epiphany got off to the most challenging of starts? Where is the light, the Joy in this mess?

Saints there is indeed light, joy and yes hope in this time of trial. For all we have to do is look our beloved Nature for a message. "Fresh Sprouts." After the wildfire has done it best to destroy everything and everyone in its path, weeks...days...even hours after the fire's demise...in the still-smoldering ground...fresh sprouts of life appear again. We find our message of hope and renewal in these mighty, little green shoots of life that refuse to die, refuse to be eliminated, refuse to yield. "Fresh Shoots," our Epiphany messengers of Hope. And those "Fresh Shoots" are us Saints. We nurtured by the Light and watered by the sky...and as St. Benedict implores us, "Always, We Begin again."

And we begin again this morning in two glorious ways. We welcome our Deacon Postulant Donna Greene into our Community of Faith and our Circle of Spirit, and we water ourselves Sprouts

thoroughly and gloriously as we renew our Baptismal Covenant as Jesus did this morning in the River Jordan.

The fire has not consumed us Saints, and we are re-birthing into the Light of the Christmas Star by the Waters of Baptism. Our Epiphany journey of light and life and hope and love will not be stopped, will not be burned down, burned up or burned out. We have poked through the scorched earth yet again...new, whole...stretching and growing... Fresh Sprouts.

“We are Wisdom Keepers sitting in a Circle. We are awakened by the Dawn and we are amazed by what we see.”

May God Bless us all...Always, Father Joe