

Fork in the Road
Angels Can Be Annoying at First

Christ the Redeemer Church
January 3, 2010
Epiphany Sunday

Matthew 2:1-12
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Herod did not have good intentions. He wanted the wise men, who wore firemen's hats in our pageant because they came "from afar", to report back to him the location of this new baby called Jesus. The Story gets complicated quickly after the birth story. Herod was threatened by the baby and the wise men sensed that they were being used by Herod as spies. They were at a fork in the road. Follow the wishes of Herod or follow their own instincts and take another path in life?

Every year is filled with forks in the road. For every person, every marriage, every career, every church. We all face forks in the road. Next Sunday is Baptism Sunday. Today is Epiphany Sunday.

Epiphany Sunday. The Sunday we celebrate the arrival of the three kings to the manger. Epiphany is a revelation. When something is revealed. When something startling happens and causes us to pause and re-think our lives. A fork in the road.

When Mason (Joseph) was pulling Claire (Mary) in the red wagon with all of her stuff in our Christmas pageant a few weeks ago, Claire yelled out "How much longer?" Mason said, "We would have been there by now if I did not have to haul all of your stuff." Claire responded, "**When you get me you get all of my stuff also.**" I loved that line. God, when you get me you get all of my baggage also.

Then Mason yelled back, "Hey, there is a fork in the road." Claire told him to just pick one route to take in the fork in the road and complained that he was always directionally challenged. Mason bent down and picked up a plastic fork in the road and showed Mary and said, "No, there really IS a fork in the road." We all loved it.

There really will be forks in the road in 2010. Yogi Berra said "When you come to a fork in the road then take it." Mason did.

Epiphany Sunday. Something revealed to us.

Stephanie Lind is a young and very talented and caring United Methodist minister in Houston. I had the privilege of meeting and working with her this past summer at the United Methodist Youth Academy up in Georgetown.

In my Storytelling workshop one day she told all of us of a lonely morning in a park in Spain that changed her life.

She was a bit directionless as to what to do in life after college. So she went to Spain and lived for a year. One Sunday morning, as I recall, she was sitting in a park and feeling lonely and a bit lost. A man came up to her and sat down and started talking. She was a bit annoyed by his presence as he interrupted her moping. Some of us like to mope alone.

Soon she told him about her dilemma in life about not knowing what to do next in life. He asked her what she dreamed about doing. She blurted out, "I have thought about becoming a minister." He said, "Well then, go do it."

Epiphany. Sometimes the task ahead of us seems daunting.

Shawn Kitchin, USAF major and ROTC faculty member at the University of Tennessee, had to write his first graduation and commissioning speech last month at the Volunteers school.

After his speech he wrote me: ***You're always sending me way too much stuff to read, so I figured I'd return the favor.** Last Sunday, we had a little commissioning ceremony for 3 cadets who were graduating mid-term. I was selected to be the narrator, and as such, I was tasked with writing the speech.*

*I had no clue what to write about. Another cadre member wrote a riveting speech last spring, so the pressure was on. It's not every day somebody receives a commission in the Air Force....our cadets had family members coming in from all over the place to witness this prestigious event and even administer to oath to their new LT. And what they would hear at this ceremony was totally my responsibility. I racked my brain for several days. I kept thinking, **"What would Gary do? That crazy old man writes a sermon each and every week. How difficult could it be if Gary can pull it off? And why is he so horrible at ping pong and softball when it's so easy for me? Focus, Shawn...focus."***

*And then it finally it struck me....at 1:45 AM when I got up to use the bathroom (yes, I'm in my 40's now...I go every 3 hours like you). Like my favorite elderly pastor Gary Smith, I was going to write about BASEBALL! People love baseball right? **Hell, over 80% of his sermons are about baseball, and he's still employed.***

So there you go. I attached an excerpt of the script so you can see how you've mentored me with speechwriting. I know it's not as eloquent as one of your pieces, but hey, it's my first whack at a baseball speech. Afterwards, many people came up to me and said they liked the baseball analogy...may have just been blowing smoke up my BDUs, but I'll chalk it up as a success regardless. Thanks for the inspiration!

Epiphany. Something revealed. Something inspired.

I was sitting at Conley's Car Wash last evening as they were finishing drying off Pam's car. Mark Ray the manager came up to me and asked me how I was doing. I told him, "I am an aging minister in a small congregation in a small town in central Texas." He said, "Sounds like you got it easy." I said, "Well, it *looked* easy before I went into it. Looked like a 20-minute a week/Sunday-morning-only easy job to me. God tricked me." Mark said, "Well, it is probably only tough because you do a good job of it." That was nice. He then asked how my Christmas was.

I told Mark of having lost our dog during Advent. Of how a Border Collie dog came to

play with Buddy and us during Buddy's last hours. Of how I was annoyed at the collie because I was losing our dog and the collie just wanted to play fetch with a ball or stick or rock...the dog brought all three items to me repeatedly as we spent our last hours with Buddy outside the vet clinic. Of how Pam said, "Gary, this border collie is an angel sent to us and to Buddy to be with Buddy during his last hours. He is here to take care of Buddy." The collie annoyed me but Pam saw an angel.

I told Mark that angels can be annoying to us at first. Mark just looked at me. Then he told me of how he prayed with his grandmother when she was dying. I was tearing up over Buddy and Mark was tearing up with me. Right there at Conley's. He said another old lady in the nursing home rolled into the room in a wheelchair while he was praying with his dying grandmother. The intruder was annoying to him. She said, "Son, don't worry. It will be okay. I died before. They brought me back. It is okay, son." Then she rolled back out of the room. He calmed down after hearing from her that it would be ok. He said to me, "You are right. Angels are annoying at first. That lady was my border collie."

With both of us having tears in our eyes and his having customers all around, he did the only logical thing a guy could do in that situation.

He said, "**Want a cold drink?**" "Sure." Guys are guys. A cold one does well in such emotional situations.

As the man in the park in Spain walked away from Stephanie she asked him his name. "Hay Suse." Jesus. She says a man named Jesus encouraged her to go into ministry. She came back to the United States and attended and graduated from Duke Divinity School. She already is an outstanding young minister in Houston. A man named Jesus actually told her to follow her dream. An Epiphany at a park in Spain on a lonely Sunday morning. I drank that cold coca cola and so enjoyed the moment. Mark had to go take care of some customers. I had a cold coke. It was an Epiphany moment. Complete with a cold one.

At every fork in the road we face in 2010, just know that angels are all around us. We are not alone. Angels may annoy you at first but they are there for you. I am sure the shepherds were at first annoyed by the screaming angels that quiet night in the field.

Angels can be annoying at first. But just get a cold one and enjoy it. God is God. Angels are around, as Pam said. It is going to be okay, like the lady told Mark. Amen.