

Chalking the Door

On the Epiphany of Our Lord, we gather at the main entrance of St. Barnabas Center for Ministry and ask God's blessing on this ministry on all who enter or pass.

Leader: Peace be to all who enter here.

Leader: A reading from Proverbs: "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures."

Leader: Let us pray: Gracious God, as a shining star once guided the magi to the birthplace of the infant Jesus, so enable those who dwell here to be your light in the world; through Jesus Christ we pray.

All: Amen.

Using chalk we inscribe the lintel of this Center for Ministry with the inscription shown below:

20 + C + M + B + 11

The three Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar followed the star of God's Son who became human 20 two thousand and (11) eleven years ago. May Christ bless St. Barnabas Center for Ministry, St. Paul's and the people and work of the Synod and Diocese and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.

Leader: A reading from Isaiah: "The effect of righteousness is peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and quiet places."

Leader: Let us pray: Gracious God, we pray that you will bless this ministry and all who minister here with your gracious presence, that your love may be our inspiration, your wisdom our guide, your truth our light, and your peace our benediction; through Jesus Christ we pray. May the Lord watch over our going out and our coming in, from this time forth and forevermore.

All: Amen.

Epiphany 2010

What a joy to be invited to this opportunity to gather for prayer and worship on Epiphany Eve as we also celebrate the Mission & Ministry of the St. Barnabas Center. I bring greetings from our Bishop and all diocesan staff and I thought it was so appropriate to begin this liturgy by Using chalk to inscribe and mark the horizontal frame above the door,

The letters C M B come from the traditional (9th century) names for the "three kings"--Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Some also suggest "Christus Mansionem Benedicat," which means "May Christ bless this dwelling."

It is absolutely brilliant to learn of the amazing ways St. Barnabas center blesses this house of prayer...and of the wisdom and vision of the folks at St. Pauls as they continue to support the variety of mission and ministry and all the wisdom and support from our Lutheran brothers and sisters..... the needs of this neighborhoods children are being met by offering this faith based afterschool program. And the The Summer Day Camp goes even further in its support as an all-day program designed to engage children on many different levels. St. Barnabas and St. Pauls together with the call to common mission ...under the direction and support of the board offers a safe place for children to grow. Epiphany is absolutely the perfect time to lift up this mission to young people....After all we just completed the 12 days of Christmas, the story is fresh in our lives...granted some of us have packed up the tree, the gifts, just to get on with it, but we still hold on to memories of Christmas plays and Christmas pageants that fill our imaginations after all

What parent hasn't gushed with pride watching his or her child play the part of a shepherd in a bathrobe or an angel with a coat hanger halo? I know that I have.

Marianne Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's defense fund shared this story in her column this year.... it was Christmas Eve and the pews at New York City's Riverside Church were packed. The Christmas pageant was underway and had come to the point at which the innkeeper was to turn away Mary and Joseph with the resounding line, "There's no room at the

inn!” The innkeeper was played by Tim, an earnest youth of the congregation who had Down Syndrome. Only one line to remember: “There’s no room at the inn!” He had practiced it again and again with his parents and the pageant director and seemed to have mastered it.

So Tim stood at the altar, bathrobe costume firmly belted over his broad stomach, as Mary and Joseph made their way down the center aisle. They approached him, said their lines as rehearsed, and waited for his reply. Tim’s parents, the pageant director, and the whole congregation almost leaned forward as if willing him to remember his line.

“There’s no room at the inn!” Tim boomed out, just as rehearsed. But then, as Mary and Joseph turned on cue to travel further, Tim suddenly yelled “Wait!” They turned back, startled, and looked at him in surprise.

“You can stay at my house!” he called.

Well, Tim had so effectively preached the Christmas Eve message at Riverside Church that the rector, Bill Coffin strode to the pulpit, said “Amen,” and sat down.

Edeleman Asks.....When will we individually and collectively as congregations, as communities, and as a nation resolve to stop saying to our children, “There’s no room at the inn”? When will we, like Tim, start saying, “You can stay at my house”?

Now the gospel for this evening takes us a step further in the question of our support for children... True this is an old story, that is filled with sentimentality of a Hallmark retelling...of ancient magi following a star bearing gifts, and paying homage...but it is also a story with many unexpected challenges and tragedies....that We don't normally associate with the birth of a baby, it is a political parody that tells the story of the demise of political power and the rise of spiritual power.

Epiphany is about the unexpected: unexpected joys and unexpected challenges and tragedies.

And yet Epiphany is filled with many unexpected revelations that change minds and ways.

Just 6 days ago, our thoughts were on Jesus in the manger. We found him visited by shepherds, men of little status whose working lives were such that they lacked the ritual cleanliness to be fully participating members of Israel’s religious life which meant in effect being outsiders. But

the Angels called them to see, and they told what they saw...

Now this evening we meet another group of outsiders, the mysterious magi. We do not know exactly the time frame when Matthew sees them as coming to visit Jesus,

But what we do know is that the magi "They were the astrologers, men of wisdom, who were speakers of the sacred words often at the pagan sacrifices. Magi were people whose activities were sometimes condemned and prohibited in the scriptures and were completely an anathema to the people of Israel."

These Magi were not just foreigners which to some would be bad enough. They were also those whose religious practices were far removed from those of Israel.

What a strange part of the story...it seems that God's blessings are to be for even the most unlikely of people. The message from the Gospel is that Christ has come to the world to demonstrate God's love for all.

What can we learn from the Magi this evening?

The Magi were searchers. they saw their lives as a journey of discovery...they did not fear the challenges... And in that they are an example to us.

Are we prepared to be diligent seekers, to see the unexpected....even in the darkest of times... Dare we like them take the risk of seeking knowing that God may well bless us with our own Epiphanys ---Epiphanies that transform us and might even take us on a different route..... the Magi who must have been transformed by such a surprising experience as they knelt before the infant Jesus decided to go home another way....they not report back to Herod what they saw, and knew and experienced....

SO Finding Jesus, led them to a different path, they ignored Herod and went home a different way... the spirituality of Epiphany—"going home by another road, taking the risk, going into the darkest of nights, knowing God is born on this earth for everyone..

Lessons from the Magi include: taking routes that we had never expected to travel, whether these involve changes in employment, health, relational, or economic status. Lead us into uncharted

paths where we are challenged to experience holiness. The path is seldom easy, but within the real limitations of life, we may discover unexpected possibilities for vocation, mission, and transformation.

Seventeen years ago in Uptown HBG neighbors noticed children on the streets during summer months, too young to be on their own yet too old to be in a day-care type setting. Bishop McNutt of the Episcopal Diocese of Central PA approached Bishop Edmiston of the Lower Susquehanna Lutheran Synod about use of a building. One thing led to another and that's when St. Barnabas was founded as a joint ministry between the Diocese & Synod. Today commitment continues to grow and be strengthened...their commitment reveals the risks, the direction and the faith... we do not let the walls of our church bind us from getting out in the community; we do not let a river stop us from reaching those in need; and we especially believe *EVERY* child deserves a chance for a bright future.

This is the spirituality of Epiphany -----God is on every road we travel. It is when we are Awakened to divine companionship that every path can become a holy adventure with surprises and epiphanies around every corner.

Soon the Holy Family will have to flee. Soon they will become refugees in need of asylum, a journey followed by so many in the two millennia that will follow. For the life of Jesus like that of the rest of humanity is no fairytale but will interact all too powerfully with the forces and challenges of darkness.

This evening we know that in Christ, God's light has entered the world. Darkness cannot put it out. And we are called to live every day as signs of the Light tonight we can celebrate that the all embracing love of Christ, the Light of the world, that is the most powerful force of all,

Even though we know that "A hidden reality of our present economic times... is the toll it is taking on children and family life, extending from physical well-being and safety to psychological health and academic achievement., parents, educators, policy experts, and

politicians ask the hard questions about whether or not the children in their care are getting the best possible chance in life...

And to be sure....Most worrisome is that the number of children living in low-income families in Pennsylvania grew this past year to nearly 40 percent of children birth to five. Their parents are struggling to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads

St. Barnabas is an important program to show how determination and faith to serve young people can transform risk and adversity into healthy development that supports school and life success. This venture between the local Episcopalians and Lutherans, takes the risk, knowing that God will bless this house and us as well with our own Epiphanies. St. Barnabas offers room at the inn. I close with a story that happened during our Sunday young children and family service. I had gathered the children around a desert box to share the story of the magi....I invited the children to remember the story of Jesus birth but I told it sharing the song...the little drummer boy....I invited the children to wonder with me...what gift would they bring to baby Jesus...after all every one received gifts for Christmas...well one boy said he would give him his drum, another boy said the engine of his train, one of our four year old girls was giving him her favorite stuffed puppy...and then there was little James, who just turned four...who sat quietly and thought and then said, I want to give Jesus my heart...

Every time we support our children in their journey we give Jesus our heart...for we share with them the love we know, the love the Magi saw, the love that Herod knew could take him down. As we go forth this evening, may the joy and the light of Epiphany guide us to the darkest of places where we can continue to serve in that love. For the Lord has indeed blessed this house.. Amen.