

[BLANK] Happy New Year! The clock struck twelve on Monday morning, and, just like that, we're in a new year. A new year to get things right. A new year to live in the blessings of our faith, to find the hope, love, joy and peace of God that we welcomed this Advent, and that we celebrated so warmly at Christmas.

[SUNRISE] But now, in the light of a new year, where is the baby Jesus? Where is the party? Where is that warmth that we felt in our hearts for God, the assurance that God is with us? It's up to us as disciples of Christ to search for that warmth together, and to continue the party with Christ that is Christian discipleship in action.

[BLANK] Will you pray with me, please: [PRAYER]

[PAGEANT] I hope that you felt the joy that I felt during our Christmas celebration. What an amazing pageant we had. People of all generations, a living baby as Jesus, stories and songs and dancing that touched our hearts. [BAPTISM] And during Advent, we renewed our baptism vows, promising to keep our covenant with God holy, becoming born again in faith, just like the baby Jesus was born on that first Christmas in Bethlehem. [CLOSEUP] It's a story so joyful that we try to squeeze it all into one big family portrait. There's Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph, and the shepherds, and the angels, and the three kings. We try to make it all as perfect as we can. [BLANK]

That's not the way that it happened, of course. It's the way that we get used to telling the story, because it reminds us of the most amazing parts, but the story of Christmas did not happen all at once. Mary and Joseph didn't stay in Bethlehem any longer than they had to; they were only there for a Roman census to pay their taxes.

In last Sunday's reading in Luke's gospel, Mary and Joseph had already moved on with Jesus. Thirty-three days after Jesus was born, they took him to Jerusalem for a ceremony at the Temple, where Simeon and Anna, people with deep faith in God, were overjoyed to see Jesus, the promised savior of Israel.

And now this Sunday, we read in Matthew's gospel that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had moved on again, living in a house, just like any other family. This new baby Jesus, born of God, was growing up. By this time, who knows, Jesus might have had a few stinky diapers already, or taken his first steps! That family portrait moment that Mary and Joseph experienced on Christmas with Jesus was starting to look more and more like everyday snapshots. Beautiful, amazing, but everyday.

And so it is with us. We want those family portrait moments from Christmas to last, [KITCHEN] but what we wind up with in our faith lives are mostly snapshot moments, moments where we try to find God in the mess of everyday living. Just as with Jesus, the angels and shepherds from Christmas are long gone in our lives, and Anna and Simeon's joy at the Temple is barely a memory. [BLANK] We can look around the world, as Mary and Joseph looked around, and see a world that in many ways is not changing, a faith that is not responding to God's call, a culture that still ignores the amazing promises given by God to Mary, Joseph, and the world, through the birth of Jesus.

And yet, for Mary and Joseph, the world was changing. The world beyond their own culture was about to recognize the importance of their baby, even if their own people

thought that he was nothing special. In other nations, religious people, in the courts of their kings, looked at the stars for signs of the future, and they saw signs of a new Jewish king being born. The signs were unmistakable. They prepared gifts for royalty, and went searching for this new king. But when they got to Jerusalem, nobody seemed to know what they were talking about. Herod an evil man, was still king, after all, and life was going on as usual. Herod knew nothing about a new king either, but he asked these wise visitors to “search diligently for the child,” and then tell him where the child was, so that Herod could visit him - or kill him.

And so, the wise men went to search diligently for the child, because they believed that there was an important child out there, somewhere. They followed the stars, checked their signs, until, finally, they arrived at an everyday house, in an everyday town, where there was an everyday family, with a child who seemed as common as the earth itself. Everyone had ignored this child, it seemed.

And perhaps that’s why the wise men knew that Jesus was the right child, the promised king. They could see that they were among people who had forgotten the hope of a good king. [HOMELESS CHILD] They could see, all along the way of their journey, people who had been forgotten by Israel: children, women, the poor, the weak, the sick, the old. They saw people who had given up on the God of hope, the God of love, the God of joy, the God of peace, people who expected nothing new from a new king, much less from God. The wise men saw people who had given up; but they did not give up on finding a king who would bring hope to everyone, no matter how humble, a king who would reveal the amazing power of God to change the world.

They searched diligently for the child, even though the child’s own people ignored him. [KINGS/JESUS] They searched diligently, and rejoiced in the humble child who they found, because they knew that this new king deserved all that they could give him, to honor the power of hope that he was bringing to a hopeless world. [BLANK]

My sisters and brothers in Christ, our king is waiting for us to form our own search party this new year, a diligent search in our hearts, and in this world, for a humble king that the world has not forgotten, a holy king who the world is rediscovering, and proclaiming as Jesus, the Christ, the true Son of God. [MAP] From Asia, to Africa, and beyond, where nations are growing the fastest, the faith that is growing the fastest is Christianity. Where people need hope, faith in Jesus Christ is growing; where the status quo has forgotten their people as surely as Herod and his people had forgotten the baby Jesus, and so many like Jesus, faith in Jesus Christ is growing. And these people are not proclaiming Jesus just where they live. Like the wise men, there are churches from around th world who are coming to America to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ as the future of the world.

[24OLDCHURCH] You may recall that the church that I served before I came here worships at the Elks Club in Middletown, because they had to sell a beautiful church building that they could no longer afford. The church that bought that building, the church that could afford it, is a church from South Korea, a church that is determined to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to a nation, our nation, that needs Christian hope as much as any

nation on earth. [BLANK]

You see, it turns out that the new, new thing in our culture, the new, new thing in this new year, is not electric cars, not the latest phone, not the latest trend on Instagram or Twitter, not whatever a sinful culture wants to sell us as new and false hope. No, the new, new thing, this year, is Christian faith, faith that will save, faith that will heal, faith that is not just born again but growing in grace, faith that is worth searching for, faith that will live in peace and hope with all people, so that we can make life a joyful celebration as people with faith in Jesus Christ, as we await the greatest party of all time, when the king of heaven and earth comes to us in glory and majesty.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we, too, are just everyday people, in everyday homes, with everyday lives, trying to find peace, wholeness, and hope. To the world, we don't look special at all. And until we accept and serve the majesty of Christ in our lives, we really aren't special at all. Without a living and serving faith in Christ, we are just people going through the motions, paying our bills, taking snapshots; having parties, but not searching for what will make our lives far more valuable than the gold, frankincense and myrrh that the wise men brought Jesus. Until we realize that we are standing before the king of all kings every day of our lives, a king who sees everything we do, a king who wants to save us from ourselves, a king who wants to help us serve the God of love in everything that we do, then we are living on borrowed time, for no good purpose at all.

This year, we have a choice: we can go and search diligently for the child of God who dwells in us and others, and grow a deeper faith together in service to God's world, or we can let another year of our lives slip by, while others receive the kingdom of God, and transform their lives and the world through God's everlasting grace.

Let's go, and search diligently for the child, together, as we begin a year of fresh commitment to Christian discipleship, and transform our lives, and the world through the everlasting power of Jesus Christ, now, and forever. Amen.