

WORSHIP NOTES

Second Sunday after Epiphany • January 15, 2012

The Season

In the Time after Epiphany, we see Jesus revealed in his baptism, words, and ministry; and we reflect on the many ways that God enters our lives. It is a season in which call, discipleship and vocation are some of the important themes. From now until Lent we will follow the narrative of Jesus' life with Mark's Gospel as our guide, but on this Second Sunday after Epiphany our reading is always from the Gospel of John. We begin our journey with a call . . .

Today is the commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr., who is remembered as an American prophet of justice among races and nations. His call led him to a life of advocacy and non-violent action for racial equality. A pastor of churches in Alabama and Georgia, he took his message to the streets of cities across the country, preaching nonviolence and returning love for hate and sharing his glimpse of what it looks like when the reign of God comes near. And through his words, his actions, his dreams . . . we began to see it too. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In 1968 he was killed by an assassin.

In Word . . .

The readings on the Second and Third Sundays after Epiphany focus on discipleship. Today we hear two call and response narratives, stories that invite us to reflect on our own ability to hear the voice of God and discern a faithful response. Listen for the wonder and invitation and assurance we hear in these voices today: "Samuel! Samuel!" (the LORD to Samuel); "Speak, for your servant is listening" (Samuel's response); "You have searched me and known me" (the psalmist, remembering God's ongoing creation of us and deep involvement in our lives); "Follow me" (Jesus to Philip); "Come and see" (Philip to Nathanael); "Rabbi, you are the Son of God" (Nathanael to Jesus). "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of Man" (Jesus to Nathanael). The call is only a starting point, an invitation to a lifelong relationship with God. Both Nathanael and Samuel are destined to see and learn and do much more, and so are we. Perhaps our journey in this season is not so much about an "experience of God" as it is about "life with God," and following God in Christ. We are invited, we are known, we are promised . . . come and see . . .

And Song . . .

Traditional (9:00)

"O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!" was written by Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608), an influential pastor and scholar remembered for his hymns that gave the church a 'new song.' This hymn conveys the hope of eternal life, and it is believed to have been written during the plague of 1597 and 1598 which took the lives of over 1,400 of the inhabitants of the city where Nicolai lived. The words have been altered over the years, but they have kept their emphasis on Christ and the eternal life he offers. This hymn was very popular in Germany, and lines and verses could be found printed on earthenware; and the tune, WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET, was often chimed by city chimes. It is often referred to as the "Queen of chorales." The "King of chorales," also by Nicolai, is the well known Advent hymn, "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying (WACHET AUF).

Contemporary (10:30)

Dan Schutte has been composing music for worship for more than thirty years and today's opening song, "Here I Am, Lord," is probably his best known piece. Based on Isaiah 6:1-8, it was written while he was in seminary at the request of a friend who needed it in three days for an ordination service. Looking back to the time when he composed this Dan writes, "the story is about God giving a power to our stumbling words, the simple works of our hands, and making them into something that can be a grace for people, with a power far beyond what we could have imagined or planned."