

Jan 5, 2024
Summerland United Church
Epiphany Sunday and Communion
A Gift from the Stars

Welcome & Territorial Acknowledgement

The 1926 lyrics reference “Mighty Gitchi Manitou” and “sons of Manitou”. Gitchi Manitou is often translated, “Great Spirit”, but it’s less “God-the-Father” and more, “Universal Energy”. Having said that, the main problem with this lyric is that it’s the wrong language, and the wrong language family.

\

The Wendat speak an Iroquoian language; Gitchi Manitou is Cree, which is part of the Algonquian language group. The lyricist didn’t account for the various First Nations in Canada, with different languages and cultures.

The lyric “kneel before the radiant Boy who brings you beauty, peace and joy” Not long after the Jesuits came among them, the Wendat lost half of their people to smallpox. The survivors were attacked by the neighbouring Iroquois, and many more died. A number of the Wendat who remained sought refuge with the Jesuits, who, in exchange for shelter, required that they profess Christianity. The few surviving Wendat were then forcibly removed from their lands, and relocated hundreds of miles away.

Dana wrote lyrics that reflect the stories that the Wendat themselves would traditionally have been sharing during midwinter, including their creation story, which describes the creation of turtle island. These are followed by two verses acknowledging the influence of Jesuit, Jean de Brébeuf.

We Sing: A Huron (Wendat) Carol, © *D L Seaborn 2018*

Dana Lynn Seaborn:

*As an Indigenous person, in the spirit of Reconciliation,
I respectfully offer lyrics reflective of Wendat (Huron) culture.*

We gather at midwinter dark to share this hallowed night.
Within our longhouse, warm and dry, the fire glows with light.
Our Elders sing a teaching song;
it fills the night that seems so long:
This is our sacred home, ‘neath heaven’s dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

Sky Woman came down from above, but found no place to stand,
till Toad put mud on Turtle’s back, and that became the land.
Sky Woman died in giving birth;
her holy body fed the earth.

This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

A valiant Little Turtle rode a cloud up to the sky;
she used the lightning to make fire, and made our Sun to shine.
He journeys 'neath the world we see,
returns to make the shadows flee.
This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

The Black Robes came from lands afar, and told us of a day
Judea had been colonized, and Rome must be obeyed.
A mother bore a child of light;
rejoicing filled the starlit night:
This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

Rejoice! Have courage one and all! The stars shine overhead,
the same stars that shone down upon a baby's humble bed.
The infant grew to be a man;
his words, like stars, light many lands.
This is our sacred home, 'neath heaven's dome,
shining stars proclaim the dawn.

Threshold

Today we celebrate the arrival of the magi at the birth of Jesus at Epiphany – which is tomorrow – Jan 6, marking the final day of the 12 days of Christmas. For many, the decorations will be put away now, if they haven't been already and we turn our attention to the new year and the return of spring. But we don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves and move on quickly. Rather, we continue pause at the stable, welcoming the gifts of the magi, the gifts of the stars – which are part of the preparation for the real work of Christmas to begin as we hear in the poem: Howard Thurman "Work of Christmas."

*"When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart."*

Scripture:

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Reflection

During Advent, we considered what it means for us, as individuals and as a church, to house the holy. How do we and how can we open the doors of the metaphorical Inn and make room for all.

We shared ways that we already do this – Monday Supper, Services at Care homes, being a listening ear, selling our property. And we were invited into a time of wonder and dreaming to imagine what other ways we could do this as we move into our future here in this location. Here in this shared space. Here in this new beginning.

Perhaps over the course of Advent, you've been inspired. Perhaps you've got some great ideas. Maybe they're big ones, maybe they're little ones. And perhaps you've looked at your inspiration and thought – oh, that's impossible, or if I suggest this, then I'll be expected to actually do it (so, I'll keep my mouth shut) Or perhaps you haven't been inspired, and have taken the longer nights of Advent to simply rest. Or, you've been working really hard at various things and haven't given it a single thought.

All of these are good. All of these are right, because it's what's been best for you. (maybe not the working really hard), but you know what I mean.

As we know, the word Epiphany means – realization, a moment of insight, a Eureka! Moment. This doesn't mean that today we're going to share any and all inspirations that may have come during advent. And we're surely not going to implement them all.

Because, when you think about it the magi, saw the star, they visited the stable, they shared their gifts and wisdom and Jesus still had to grow up and learn more before he could begin his ministry.

Isaiah invites us to rise because the light has come. To look around and see the light glistening in the world. To recognize it and relish in it.

To recognize it and relish in it. We don't do that enough, I think. Sit back and just appreciate what has already been accomplished. We finish something and it's immediately on to the next project, the next piece of work to be done. There's always a to-do list waiting.

You may remember, that we wrote a Ministry Plan last year – a 5 year plan – for this move and post sale of the property. We were very intentional regarding this first year in this location. The intention of this year is to take time to build relationships. Build relationships with St. Stephen, build relationship with this building, its grounds and this

location. It's a time for us to reestablish roots, get a solid and grounded stance in this place.

This year is our opportunity to continue to imagine, wonder and intentionally discern what's next for us. As I've said before – what are we as individuals and as a community of faith uniquely suited to do here in Summerland? What will our next call be?

But before we get overwhelmed, thinking that's so big, I want to bring us back to Richard Wagamese' words, from Christmas Eve, of 'genuineness and simplicity'. Whatever our call is, and we'll know it when we hear it, doesn't have to be overwhelming – it could be very simple. And whatever it is, it might feel impossible at first – but we've done the impossible, so that needn't stop us.

When the Magi arrive at the house, they see a tiny baby. A baby that is vulnerable, and needs tender care and love. We need to treat this time of gentle wondering and vision with the same tender care and love. We need to give it time to grow, so we nourish it, care for it, keep it warm.

Over the next few months, and this is all in very early newborn stages, we'll plan some intentional times to wonder and imagine together as a community.

There are a few little initiatives in the works which we'll bring forward in the coming weeks. The two I'll name now are the Sunday Squads and the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on Jan 24th. (more information coming soon).

We'll find some ways to shine light on the possibilities, shine light through our open doors of welcome and hospitality. This season of light – Epiphany is long this year.

Epiphany, as a season in the church, lasts from January 6th until Ash Wednesday, which this year is March 5. For us in the Western Hemisphere and far from the equator, these are months of dreary darkness. Yes, the light is slowly returning, but it can seem a long way off. So today we receive our light from the stars a word that might shed more light in some area of your life.

At the end of service you are invited to choose a paper star. On each star is printed a word.

This word is your gift from the stars for this coming year. Perhaps you'll connect with the word right away, perhaps you'll feel affronted by this word. Perhaps this word won't make any sense to you at all. Any response you have is good. And maybe you'll put this star in your pocket or bag and forget about it the moment you walk out the door. Or maybe you'll put your star somewhere that you will see it everyday and think about this gift and what it means for you. Any response you have is all good.

However you receive this gift, know that it is freely given with no expectation. We'll hand out stars at the end of service. And now let us prepare ourselves for our first communion of 2025.