

C Baptism of Our Lord 1.9.22

Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Focus Statement: The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

Teresa and I got in a conversation this week about what kind of car Jesus would drive.

Teresa posited she saw him in an Astrovan, and I think I agree with her. I think Jesus would have liked to be driving some sort of an electric vehicle, because of the environment, but those suckers are expensive, and Jesus doesn't have that kind of money. Instead, he's probably tooling around in some beater of a van with the floorboard all but rusted out. Maybe if he's got a handy enough buddy—mechanic being the modern-day equivalent of fisherman—he's gotten it converted to running on vegetable oil or something super hippie like that. But more than likely, he's just pouring oil into it every few trips and praying the muffler—held on with tape and prayer—stays in place.

Jesus could be on a bicycle, and probably does some trips that way as well. Not a nice bicycle either. I know bike culture; I know there are bikes that cost more than a Tesla. No, I'm talking about the kind of bike I rode in DC, a red galaxy road bike from the 70s that was so small my knees hit the drop bars on turns and weighed more than I did. A bike for getting from one place to another. But the thing about bikes that brings me back to the Astrovan idea, is bikes are excellent for carrying one person, and one person alone. Add an additional person, or a thing, and it's going to be a long day. I've ridden a bike, that bike, with a person balanced on the carrying rack, or a week's worth of groceries in a backpacking pack on my back, or a fifty-pound bag of birdseed hanging from the handlebars, and I can tell you, it's possible but it's not great. Bicycles are for getting yourself someplace. Vans are for hauling people and things.

And I think Jesus would have been in the people hauling business. I think Jesus would have been constantly picking up addicts and moving them to safe places, Narcan in the glove box just in case, helping single moms get kids to school and themselves to work, carting food and supplies to people and places that needed them, and hauling furniture in and out of the revolving door of apartments and rentals and storage units of the housing insecure.

I think Teresa was right and Jesus drives an Astrovan, because scripture never talks about Jesus as being with a Tesla-affording crowd. I was listening to a podcast this week and the host was talking about how he always asks his kids question when he reads them Bible stories, because he's always on the hunt for sermon illustrations. And of course my ears perked up, because I too am always on the hunt for sermon illustrations. He said this week for Epiphany he read his daughter the story of the wise men from Matthew's Gospel. Even though we're celebrating Epiphany this Sunday, I didn't actually read the text today, but the summary is three wise men from the east follow a star looking for the king of Israel. When they got close, they asked King Herod where the child was. King Herod didn't know but asked the wise men to tell him when they found the child, so he could go honor him as well. Though of course the real reason was so Herod could kill a perceived threat to his power. The wise men went and found Jesus in the last place Herod would think to look, a stable, and then did not return to Herod but went back to the east by another road.

They read this story together and then the host asked his daughter, what makes the wise men wise? She thought about for a minute and responded, “the wise men were wise because they knew that you don’t look for kings in palaces, you look for them in stables.”

“You don’t look for kings in palaces, you look for them in stables.” The eight-year-old is right when the king is Jesus, but that truth is so opposite of where the world would think to look for kings. It wasn’t where you’d find King Herod, that guy had like six palaces. But if you want to find Jesus, as the wise men knew, the proper place to look was among the lowly.

We’re combining Epiphany and Baptism of Our Lord this Sunday, so we jump from the wise men to Jesus’ baptism. Appropriately, the stable dwelling baby king grew up to be the kind of man whose baptism story started not with him or with John, but with “the people.” “The people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts.” Jesus’ baptism surrounded by people questioning tells us something about the kind of king Jesus is, he is the kind of king who surrounds himself with questioners. The Greek here is *prosdokaō*, and it means to look towards an as yet unknown future. This is a crowd that is not passively waiting, they are actively participating in this unfolding narrative. John has given them a lot to think about, and their questions are helping expand the epiphany, if you will, the revelation of what this one who is more powerful will be like. Throughout Luke’s Gospel we’ll see that group questions and musing are not examples of lack of faith or doubt, they are demonstrations of people engaged in coming to know God better. Astrovan Jesus has a people hauling car not just for serving, but for learning. The story of Jesus’ baptism

tells us that there is something powerful and important in our questions. When we are together, especially when we are together with people with different experiences and upbringings than ourselves, those different viewpoints help us see where God is in our own time and place.

And then the people who had questioned were baptized, and Jesus also had been baptized, and was praying, and that is when the Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove. This tells us something not just about Jesus but also about prayer. What triggers the audible and visual pronouncement of who Jesus is in Luke's Gospel isn't the baptism itself, it is the prayer that followed. Prayer doesn't transform the world around us, it transforms us to transform the world. There is a quote by Pope Francis that I think sums up prayer perfectly, "prayer calls us to action. We don't pray that someone will do something, we pray and then we do something, that is how prayer works."

From Jesus baptism, as we'll read going forward, Jesus called disciples, preached on the blessedness of the weak, healed the sick, ate with sinners, and proclaimed the coming kingdom of God. I think Teresa was right on in her assessment that Jesus drives an astrovan because Jesus is the kind of king, the kind of God, who surrounds himself with all sorts of people. The good news for us who too have been washed in the waters of baptism, who too have been called beloved children of God, is there is space in the Astrovan for us. There is space in the Astrovan, there are people to help when it is our stuff that needs hauling, there is room for our questions, concerns, and all our baggage, literal and

figurative. You can change in an Astrovan, your clothes, your mind, your life. Ever tried to change in a roadster, there is not enough space for that.

That's the good news, here's the challenge with Jesus and his Astrovan, there's always room for more. There are people who are not yet here, who need to be, who there is space for.

So how then, do we make space for them, how do we help them find their space in the van?

The baptism story has an answer for us. Prayer. Prayer helps us find our belovedness, prayer helps us learn how to act, how to move. God created communities like this one for us, so that we could be challenged and changed by each other, so we could learn how to be, how to act. And, most importantly, so that we could know that we too are beloved. Dear people of God, there is space for you in the van. Not just space for you to serve, but space for you to be served as well. Space for you and for others. Thanks be to God. Amen.