

"THE OTHER WISE MAN"

A Christmas Meditation By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
December 24th, 1998
Christmas Eve Service

INTRODUCTION

One of the most convincing measures of the magnitude and meaning of Christmas is the impressive amount of literature...prose and poetry...that it has inspired. Christmas, indeed, has a unique way of awakening our sensibilities and firing up our imaginations. I mentioned this in a sermon two weeks ago when I touched on that movie we all love, "It's A Wonderful Life"...

Henry Van Dyk also felt the power of Christmas is an exceptional way. The result was his immortal classic, The Story Of the Other Wise Man. Familiar to some of you, it's one of those stories that we do well to hear at this time of year. Its meaning spills over into our lives.

Henry Van Dyk, a hundred years ago, was the pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church up the street at Park Avenue and 91st Street. Dr. Anderson of the Brick Church mentioned to me earlier this week that the original manuscript for this fictional account is found in his Pastor's study.

I hope that your holiday season will be richer and fuller for hearing this story once again...here this night.

PRAYER

"Help us, Lord, to be master of ourselves that we may become the servants of others.

Take our lips and speak through them...our minds and think through them...our hearts and set them on fire. In the spirit of the Child of Bethlehem, we pray. Amen."

"Not so, my Lord. WHEN saw I YOU hungry and fed YOU? Or, thirsty and gave YOU drink? WHEN saw I YOU a stranger and took YOU in and came unto YOU? I have never seen YOUR face or ministered unto YOU."

Then came the voice again....faint and far away, yet...clear and compelling...

"Verily, I say unto you...inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these...my brothers and my sisters... you have done it unto Me."

Artaban's heart was filled to overflowing...with joy...with peace....a quietness and a radiance came over him. His long journey was over. His treasures were accepted. For the "other" Wise Man had found the King of Kings.

* * * * *

FELLOWSHIP

Before we proceed to the Christmas offering and then the candle lighting....let me mention that there will be a time of informal fellowship following this service....downstairs in the Russell Room. And all are invited. Christmas Even can be a lonely time for many in the city. Come on down and share in the warmth and the cheer of this blessed night. My thanks to all those who have made it possible.

OFFERING

Christmas is a time of giving as well as a time of receiving. We thank you for the many, many generous gifts already received in recent days and hours for the work of this city parish. We thank you, too, for the gifts to be received here this night. They do make a difference and send out a strong message of love and of caring to this community, this city, and out into the world. As a grown man, the child of Bethlehem, said:

"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN IT IS TO RECEIVE"

"THE OTHER WISE MAN"

A Christmas Meditation By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
December 24th, 1998
Christmas Eve Service

INTRODUCTION

One of the most convincing measures of the magnitude and meaning of Christmas is the impressive amount of literature...prose and poetry...that it has inspired. Christmas, indeed, has a unique way of awakening our sensibilities and firing up our imaginations. I mentioned this in a sermon two weeks ago when I touched on that movie we all love, "It's A Wonderful Life"...

Henry Van Dyk also felt the power of Christmas is an exceptional way. The result was his immortal classic, The Story Of the Other Wise Man. Familiar to some of you, it's one of those stories that we do well to hear at this time of year. Its meaning spills over into our lives.

Henry Van Dyk, a hundred years ago, was the pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church up the street at Park Avenue and 91st Street. Dr. Anderson of the Brick Church mentioned to me earlier this week that the original manuscript for this fictional account is found in his Pastor's study.

I hope that your holiday season will be richer and fuller for hearing this story once again...here this night.

PRAYER

"Help us, Lord, to be master of ourselves that we may become the servants of others.

Take our lips and speak through them...our minds and think through them...our hearts and set them on fire. In the spirit of the Child of Bethlehem, we pray. Amen."

Fingering them...he then slowly put them back into the velvet pouch and returned them into a deep pocket of his beautiful robe. He then went over to the window and lifting the heavy curtain, gazed out into the darkness of the eastern sky. As the first signs of the dawn were beginning to appear, even as he stood there looking upward - three great stars seemed to come together in the heavens and were fused into one. Then a new star sprang forth that grew in size and in brilliance and in beauty. Oh, his heart trembled with excitement. He said out loud to himself,

"That is the sign! The King is born. I must go and find Him and worship Him...and bring my gifts to Him. That is the sign".

HE DEPARTS

Day after day Artaban's horse made its way through the forest of the Orontes mountains. He knew that he would have to ride hard and fast if he were to meet his three companions in Babylon within their specified ten day period. He pressed on and on until he was within three hours ride of his destination when his horse suddenly slackened her pace. Within the shade of a pine grove his horse stopped, quivering before the dark form of a man lying across the road. Artaban quickly dismounted and found that the man was dying from the dreaded marshland fever. A conflict stirred within his heart. Should he stop or should he go on? Should he risk losing out in his quest for the Divine King in order to save this poor Hebrew peasant who was in need? If he DELAYED...his companions in Babylon would not wait. They would go on without him. But if he ventured on, this sick man would surely die...

He stood there for a few moments...wondering what to do...then quickly he turned his attention to the "fever-stricken" man. His decision made, he bent over and skillfully ministered to the man...for two days he did this. At long last the sick man lifted his head and feebly asked, "Who are you that you should have saved my life?"

"I am Artaban - one of the MAJI. I am going to Jersualem in serach of the One who is born King of the Jews - the Prince of Peace....the Deliverer of all people".

"Go not to Jerusalem" whispered the Jewish peasant, "For our prophets long ago told us that the King would be born in Bethlehem....may the Lord bring you in safety to that place....."

ARTABAN CONTINUES

Upon reaching Babylon, Artaban discovered that the three other Maji had already departed and it was now necessary for him to sell the sapphire...one of his three precious gifts for the King... in order to buy several camels and drivers and he then in turn set out in the direction of Bethlehem...travelling pretty much alone.

After many days of hard travel over desert wastes, he finally reached the little town of Bethlehem. He was weary and exhausted but full of hope, bearing his ruby and his pearl to present to the infant King. Stopping first at a low stone hut where he found a mother singing her baby to sleep, he asked her where he could find this new-born Messiah. She said to him,

"His parents have fled with Him to Egypt, for King Herod, fearing this new King, has threatened to kill all of the babies in this town of Bethlehem....."

"Not so, my Lord. WHEN saw I YOU hungry and fed YOU? Or, thirsty and gave YOU drink? WHEN saw I YOU a stranger and took YOU in and came unto YOU? I have never seen YOUR face or ministered unto YOU."

Then came the voice again....faint and far away, yet...clear and compelling...

"Verily, I say unto you...inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these....my brothers and my sisters... you have done it unto Me."

Artaban's heart was filled to overflowing...with joy...with peace....a quietness and a radiance came over him. His long journey was over. His treasures were accepted. For the "other" Wise Man had found the King of Kings.

* * * * *

FELLOWSHIP

Before we proceed to the Christmas offering and then the candle lighting....let me mention that there will be a time of informal fellowship following this service....downstairs in the Russell Room. And all are invited. Christmas Even can be a lonely time for many in the city. Come on down and share in the warmth and the cheer of this blessed night. My thanks to all those who have made it possible.

OFFERING

Christmas is a time of giving as well as a time of receiving. We thank you for the many, many generous gifts already received in recent days and hours for the work of this city parish. We thank you, too, for the gifts to be received here this night. They do make a difference and send out a strong message of love and of caring to this community, this city, and out into the world. As a grown man, the child of Bethlehem, said:

"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN IT IS TO RECEIVE"