

Looking For God
January 21, 2007
Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

Where do we look for God? That is the question of Epiphany, superseded, of course, by the question *Do we look for God?*

The normal response would be that we look for God in the world about us. We gaze at a magnificent sunset, or take in a mountain range's purple majesty, and we fall silent in awe at some kind of Higher Power at work in the world. We stare at the stars and galaxies that sparkle their presence to us and we ponder what mystery lies behind their existence. We take in the hush of a snowfall, or we behold the movement of the tides and are awed by the wide expanse of the sea, and God *somehow* seems to be real.

On a more religious level, we look for God in the incense rising at solemn High Mass, or in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, or in the sweet angelic voices from a children's choir echoing through the Church. We look for God in the blessed wine and broken bread.

All well and good. However, the answer that the sequence of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany startles us with is both *unforeseen* and *unexpected*. We are to look for God returning on the clouds in the Cosmic Jesus, the

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judge of history. We are to look for God in a locust-eating, fire-breathing prophet named John

We are to look for God in the irregular pregnancy of a peasant Jewish girl. We are to look for God in the birth of a baby boy in a shed surrounded by livestock. We are to look for God in three astrologers from Persia who have followed a bizarre star for hundreds of miles. We look for God even as the enlightened men of the East offer obeisance and gifts to the infant King of the *Jews*. We look for God in the horrific slaughter of infants in Bethlehem at the hands of a savage despot. We look for God in the wrinkled faces of Simeon and Anna in the temple as the two old saints hail the arrival of the Child Messiah, the Deliverer. We look for a precocious adolescent confounding the doctors of divinity with his wisdom at the time of his becoming a *son of the law*.

We look for God as one unusual man submits to the baptismal rite of another unusual man in the waters of the Jordan River. We look for God as the heavens open and the Spirit descends on Jesus *as a dove*, and as a voice thunders from heaven. We look for God in a wedding celebration in an obscure Galilean village, where water repeatedly gets turned into

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fine wine. And then today; today we see a man in his prime, victorious from his *vision quest* in the desert wasteland, having inaugurated his life vocation of proclamation and healing and now returning to his home village. Look for God here, the Church tells us and so we do.

And Jesus points the way. He has found God in desert; now he will find God in the Book. He turns to the prophecy in Isaiah. In doing so, Jesus tells us to look for God in Scripture. It is not by accident with four readings from Scripture every Sunday, that we have a cycle of Lectionary readings for every day and night of the year, not to mention those for special feasts and fasts. We are a people who look for God in his Holy Word, not exclusively or exhaustively, but *definitively*. Not as fundamentalists, but as Mystery seekers, and as people shaped by a primordial tradition that has survived for millennia.

The episode in Nazareth reveals to us that *God is found in our daily lives, in the communities where we live and move and have our being.*

When Jesus reads the specific Isaiah passage to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth, this action tells us to *look for God where people*

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hurt. The Gospel happens most powerfully when the Spirit of the Lord, dwelling in the Lord's people, is brought to bear on human suffering. Looking for God? Look where the Gospel intersects with the poor. Look for God where the Gospel releases the captives, the blind and the oppressed. It is there that we see God, in suffering transformed into Jubilee.

I remember, years and years ago, when the first Soviet cosmonaut, Uri Gagarin looked for God in outer space. He didn't find him there and returned to earth unconvinced as to God's reality. We won't find him there either.

But what if we look into the eyes of the hurting and do something about it? What if we do our part to turn another's suffering into joy?

What if?

AMEN.