

Devotion – Second Week of Christmastide, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

A new year has come. A year when we should be celebrating the end of COVID and the freedom to travel, eat in restaurants, and get together with friends and family in gatherings as large as we want them to be. But here we are again, almost exactly like we were last year for New Year's. I have days when I feel like I'm in exile in Babylon. Waiting for the good news of being able to go back to life as I've been used to. It's exhausting – remembering to put on my mask as soon as I get out of the car at the grocery store or dentist or church. Remembering that going to a restaurant is not necessarily a safe thing. Focusing on staying safe and healthy from a virus I can't even see.

When you read this, Jim and I will be in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary. This is where we spent our honeymoon. Except this time, we will have masks on when we are around people or in buildings. We won't feel so free to take excursions outside of the hotel complex. And we will worry about testing negative so we can come back home.

Heawoon and her family have left for Korea, to visit her mother, who is extremely ill with a fourth bout of cancer. Her trip has already had a twist, in that Korea recently announced that all people entering the country must quarantine for ten days. So she can't see her mother when she gets there, until this waiting time period is over.

A new reality that is scary. People who have been fully vaccinated are still getting the Omicron variety of COVID. Now we're not sure how to stay safe, except to keep masking in public and to avoid crowded places. We remain in exile – an exile of isolation and fear.

So I'm reminded to look to God to give me strength and hope. Just like the wise men had faith to follow that strange star to find a strange new king – a baby in Bethlehem. I don't know what God has in store for me, but I trust that God cares for me. We talked about the elders who blessed the baby Jesus in the temple last Sunday, and this week we will talk about the wise men who blessed the baby Jesus in a manger. God doesn't have to spell out a plan for the world that we can put on our calendars and follow, thinking that everything is predictable and safe. This world doesn't operate that way. But I do know that God has a plan – it may not be obvious to me, just like it wasn't to the wise men. But God will include me in that plan, and it will be one of love and care.

So this year, I will focus on being a wise elder who provides love and care to others, knowing that you at Philadelphia are also wise elders called to do the same. And if we all do that, we will be enfolded with God's grace.

Jeanne