

# Sermon for Sunday, January 5, 2020 - "No Excuse Sunday"

Epiphany Sunday  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Pr. Tom Buresh

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

So, tomorrow is January 6 which is the day of Epiphany. Today, the Second Sunday after Christmas, is Epiphany Sunday. The word Epiphany comes from Greek and means 'to show', referring to Jesus being revealed to the world. It marks a visit to the baby Jesus by Three Kings or Wise Men or Magi. The three Kings, from what I read, represented Europe, Arabia and Africa. Epiphany is celebrated twelve days after Christmas, so thus on January 6.

So, I could go on and on about the facts about Epiphany. In fact, I found ten facts about it that I could share but am not, so you can look them up yourself if you want. Instead, I decided to go quite a different direction concerning the wise men. I have always been amazed about how pastors choose what to talk about from a scripture reading. If I was out in the congregation today and listening to my sermon, I am sure I would be thinking, "Wow, how did he come up with that idea!" Well I did, so this morning I want to talk about what excuses the Magi might have given to King Herod as to why they went home a different way - kind of. Really, I want to talk about excuses in general. In fact, I would like, with permission from Pastor Amy of course, to declare today "No Excuse Sunday".

(The ushers passed out "No Excuse" signs.)

Yes, I would like to talk about excuses today as we start another new year. You know, all those New Year's Resolutions everyone makes, well some of you make anyway. It doesn't take long to find excuses for not keeping them, does it?

But for me, after teaching school for 33 years, when I think of excuses, I think of all the excuses I heard for not having homework done or even not coming to class. My favorite is a letter from a parent- *Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it Monday, we thought it was Sunday.*

Then, when I became a pastor after retiring from teaching, I started hearing excuses for not coming to church. The music isn't their style. Not a good service time. Kids are fussy in church. Just too busy. Just to name a few. So today, please raise your banner high to help me declare today to be "No Excuse Sunday".

Now, I know that I am “preaching to the choir”, as they say, because all of you are here. But yet, that is exactly why I am preaching to you, because you are here, you are the choir that sings and prays and worships God in church most Sundays. And, YOU are the ones who care about Good Shepherd Lutheran Church! But, most importantly, since other people aren’t here, well, you are the ones who need to carry today’s message to them.

Let me tell you a little story that I love to tell about a little country church about 35 miles southwest of here. It’s the church my wife, Connie, grew up in and we were married in. Anyway, the foundation of the old church was getting bad so it was fix it or build a new one. You know the saying, “build it and they will come!” Well, they built a new one and people came and came and came. Why? Because the members asked others to come and join them. It wasn’t the pastor, Dan Christensen, who invited them. It was the members who did. I have filled its pulpit a few times and 30-some kids came up to the children’s time.

As you might expect, my message is not just about inviting others to Good Shepherd, although that is certainly part of it. The message is also about the excuses we give for not doing lots of things - like following God’s call to us. So, what’s your excuse? We all have them. Certainly our ancestors in the faith had their excuses. Moses is high on the list. He kept coming up with excuse after excuse as to why he couldn’t follow what God was asking him to do. Who am I that I should go? I am not a very good speaker. What if they don’t listen to me? Oh Lord, just please send someone else!

Or how about Jonah? When God asked Jonah to go preach to Nineveh, Jonah ran the opposite direction to try and get out of it. He ended up in the belly of a big fish before he realized it would have been easier to just do God’s will.

Just one more example you may not be as familiar with - Jeremiah was a young boy when he was called by God. Of course, Jeremiah used youth as an excuse. “I’m only a boy, I’m too young!”, he told God. I guess in a way, we can’t blame him. Besides that, the ministry God is calling him to is one that will start with destruction, long before he will get a chance to build, which he does. So, what is your excuse? What excuse do you give instead of following God with YOUR life? - too old, tired, poor, busy, weak, scared, bashful, depressed, angry, overwhelmed, too ...?

Ephesians 1:4, which is in the lectionary for today, not for Jan 6 which we used today, tells us that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Yes, Moses, Jonah and Jeremiah were all called before they were even formed in the womb. And you know what, so are you and I. God has a purpose and God has a plan for each of us. And, it is a plan that when we say yes to God, Jesus promises to help us along the way. And better yet, promises us an abundant life both now and into eternity.

So, what happens when we say, yes? When Moses finally said yes, he helped to form the 12 disorganized tribes into the nation of Israel. After Jonah rode in the belly of a fish and finally said yes, his preaching was so effective that the whole city of Nineveh repented! And when Jeremiah said yes, he helped guide the southern kingdom of Judah through its exile in Babylon and gave it the vision of a new covenant from God. Yep, here we are, the “choir”. What is God calling us to do? And then, when God calls, and I truly believe God has called or will call each and every one of us, what excuse might you use to stop you from saying “yes” to God? Maybe you need a brother to walk along with you like Aaron did with Moses. Fine, use one! Do you need to ride in the belly of a fish for a while before you say “yes”? Well, go ahead and jump in!

So in closing, as we think back to this past Advent season, it almost seems like someone must have given a “no excuse” sign to several people involved - to Mary, to Joseph, to the innkeeper, to the shepherds, to the Magi.

And now today. Today is our turn! Today is our turn to listen to what God has to say to us and then if we become hesitant to follow that call, remember, “No Excuses!”