Today marks the new season according to our liturgical calendar – the season of Epiphany, which means “shining” or “revealing”. In the Latino community, Epiphany is celebrated as the day when the three Wisemen arrived and paid their homage by presenting their gifts to the Messiah child. Many Children would receive gifts from their parents…and that’s on top of what they already gotten from Christmas.

 As I shared with you back on Christmas Eve, the gifts that those three Wisemen brought may not be the most suitable gifts at that time for a newborn infant and his parents, but they were thoughtful and rich in symbolism of who this Messiah child would eventually become and what he would do one day for all of humanity. Their gifts also represented the prayers of the people, as their long-expected Savior had finally arrived. All the hopes and prayers are upon this newborn child and what he would do, as he matured and grew in wisdom. Within the Latino community, the arrival of the Wisemen is filled with much hopes and promises of their future.

 Our text this morning also reflected the very same sentiment of hope for the coming Messiah more than 1,000 years earlier. This long-expected Messiah, in the form of a king, was to come and save the people from a desperate and sin-filled hopeless world. Psalm 72 was written by King David’s son – Solomon, who wrote it as a prayer and a prophesy of what this new king would be like. He described this future ideal king as someone who would be honored and worshipped among neighboring kings, yet he would also fulfill his duty as a king among his people. This king would not only rule according to God’s wisdom, but will also redeem his people with righteousness and deliver justice among those who are poor, oppressed, and voiceless.

 Earlier this week, I came across an article that was published in the *Presbyterian Outlook[[1]](#footnote-1)* magazine, and written by a ministry colleague friend of mine - the Rev. Tony Lin. Tony is a fellow Presbyterian minister who’s of Taiwanese descent but he grew up in Argentina through much of his childhood and teenage years. So he is fluent in Spanish, Taiwanese and English of course. He went to *Princeton Seminary* a few years before me. He was ordained by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and is currently a research scholar at the *Institute of Advanced Studies in Culture* down at the University of Virginia.

 In his article Tony shared an incident that he recently encountered a couple of months ago when he met a migrant refugee family from Hondorus, who is now living in Virginia. The story that we’re about to hear brings to light of the true meaning of what this season of Epiphany is all about, as we bring and share the light of Christ among those who are struggling and living in the midst of darkness and fear of this world. The article is entitled “***When Children Pray***”.

 ***The call came in the afternoon.*** *“Tony, there’s a lady here who doesn’t speak English. Can I put you on speakerphone?” Her name was Lizzy. (That’s not her actually real name of course, in order to protect her real identity and privacy.) She lived in Honduras with her six children surviving in the midst of the violence that plagued her neighborhood. Her church was her shelter.* ***It was her sacred space. A sanctuary in the midst of chaos.******A sanctuary from the death and despair all around her.*** *She [Lizzy] was reminded daily that her faith would keep her safe. Her faith taught her that God would grant victory when everything else spelled defeat. While violence ravaged her town, her faithful prayers were answered. She quietly raised her children and her sister’s children as she managed a living for almost 14 years.*

 *But everything changed when her nephew turned 13. The local gangs began to court him. At first, they tried to lure him. They offered him drugs and money, but her nephews spent more time in church than anywhere else. They had been trained to resist the vices of this world. Soon gang members began to show up at Lizzy’s house offering her money if her nephews were allowed to “come out and play.” She got scared and kept the children at home, but knew it was no solution. As the gangs became more aggressive, she snuck her sister’s children out of the house and sent them to live with their father in Mexico. Word soon got out that Lizzy’s nephews had left the country and gang members began shouting “Miguelito” outside her house. Miguelito was a 10-year-old classmate of Lizzy’s daughter. His brother had promised to join the gang but got scared and ran away. When it was clear that he wasn’t coming back, Miguelito’s body was found in the middle of the street, stabbed 26 times as a warning to others.*

* One day Lizzy sent her son Alan to get some groceries when the men from the gang grabbed him and beat him. They told him to get ready to join the gang. He had just turned 12. Lizzy made repeated reports to the police, but it made no difference. It was viewed as individual cases of neighborhood bullying. So [Lizzy] locked her children home to keep them safe.*

 *One day a neighbor came running to Lizzy, “They’re coming to take Alan! They’re coming to take Alan!” The word on the street was that the gang had decided to take Alan or kill one of his siblings as a lesson. A desperate Lizzy gathered her documents, prayed with her church one last time and got on a bus with all her children in hopes of a miracle. When she arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border, she crossed the bridge by foot with her children and turned herself in to the Border Patrol. She was processed along with all the asylum seekers that have flooded the southern border. They were released on “parole” (even though they had committed no crime) and given one year to secure legal representation to argue their case for asylum before a court. Lizzy was unaware that a miracle had already taken place. She entered the U.S. at the height of President Trump’s “zero tolerance” policy resulting in family separations, but by some miracle was allowed to enter with her children. Two weeks after Lizzy arrived in the U.S., Trump signed an executive order to stop family separations.*

 *[Lizzy] She was released to come to Virginia. That’s where our paths crossed. A local pastor was alerted about the needs of this family and called me because I could speak Spanish. The faithfulness of this family was clear the moment I met them. Her children looked me in the eyes and said, “Buenas tardes, pastor” as they shook my hand. We talked about their new life, their schools and their needs. As with any pastoral call, I offered to pray with them before I left. The children sat up straight and smiled with the relief of a familiar practice. They’d done this before. As soon as I started praying, the children began to follow my prayer under their breath. It’s a very common Pentecostal practice. They were “agreeing” with my prayers. “Sí señor. Amén. Gloria a Dios. Te pedimos Señor. Gracias Jesús.” They prayed with the innocence of a child speaking to a parent. Assuming they would be heard. Believing they are being heard because they’ve asked their father in Heaven for their daily bread in a way that most American Christians have never asked. So they mumbled words of consent as if to help lift up my prayers closer to the ears of God.*

*Their God is good because they made it to the United States. They are safely away from the gangs that threatened them. They are together as a family. And now they pray for a chance to stay in this country where they need not fear for their lives. Their gratitude was overflowing even while they had such desperate needs. When I was younger, I was taught to pray that God would break my heart with the things that break God’s heart. It’s a dangerous prayer because God answers even after years of not praying it. As I prayed with these children in front of me, I heard in my mind the prayers of the thousands of children [who are] separated from their parents at the border, pleading that God would reunite them [someday]. I heard the prayers of the thousands of children still living in places ravaged by violence. Even as I have long prayed for these families I had forgotten that there are children also praying. I heard the children’s prayers that God hears constantly.*

 *How will the Body of Christ answer? How is God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven in this instance? There are some churches that have already become literal sanctuaries. They have become a refuge in a ruthless and merciless world. But just like I learned when I was a child, the church is not a building but the people. “What would you have done in Nazi Germany?” is less and less [of] a hypothetical question in America. Beyond offering physical sanctuary in our churches, Christians can create jobs for these immigrants, offer free rides, mentor children, create a hedge of protection around them by creating neighborhoods and communities that will not tolerate the bullying and targeting of immigrants. And we can give sacrificially out of our abundance.* ***The church is the miracles children are praying for all across the United States.******Let us be good and faithful servants with what we have been entrusted and become the answer to our own prayers.***

 As we journey into this season of Epiphany, may our eyes and our hearts be enlightened to see the world from a whole new spectrum. Listen to the prayers and stories of those who are voiceless and in the midst of struggles and oppressions, especially the children and their parents who are separated and faced imminent danger by threats of violence from local gangs or even politicians who see them as less than human. May the Prince of Peace shine his light to the world and upon the people who are in desperate need once again of a Savior.

 As the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed to the people, *Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

 In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Lin, Tony *Presbyterian Outlook, 11/21/18* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 60:1-3, 6* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)