

Where is this child?
 December 30, 2007
 Rev. Dr. Chris Ayers
 Matthew 2:1-4

I need to find it and fast, preferably before 2008. Could somebody, I don't care who, could someone please tell me where the fountain of youth is?

It's almost a new year, and I'm running out of years, running out of time, running out of life, running out of energy, running out of just about everything. Actually, I'm not running, more like walking, creeping, plodding, poking along.

Which brings me to Warren Tadlock who I'm having trouble forgiving. Warren raise your hand.-----Warren is a fine fellah but he unintentionally hurt my feelings and sent me into a depression as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon.

Warren and Emily donated a television to the church so our homeless guests, our Room In the Inn participants, could watch the tube and take in some DVD movies. Like I said, Warren is a nice chap. But when he called me up about coming over to his residence to help him move the television to the church, he told me---and I don't think he was taking a jab at me but he might have been---he told me to wear my basketball shoes because----- because the TV was on the second floor and the television was heavy and the stairs were steep and he didn't want me to fall. He suggested I wear my basketball shoes.

Do you know how long it's been since I owned a pair of basketball shoes?

Warren, former UNC basketball player, still wears basketball shoes, but I haven't owned any since 1989. Why would I own basketball shoes when my dog has a greater vertical leap than I do? Why would I wear basketball shoes when 10 minutes of backyard basketball sends my system into cardiac arrest? Asking me if I wear basketball shoes!-----But as I said, Warren wears basketball shoes and I---and I need to find this so-called fountain of youth so I can start wearing basketball shoes again. Could someone, anybody please tell me where the fountain of youth is?

And while you are at it, another thing you can find for me----and you can even count it as a late Christmas gift because I accept late Christmas gifts all year long, for the record-----another thing you can find for me is Atlantis. Yes, Atlantis, not to be confused with Atlanta.-----Atlantis, now there's a real world class city. They probably even have a professional football team that wins and I bet they didn't have any long debate about light rail and when it came to replacing their sheriff----well, I'm not even going to go there. Anybody know where Atlantis is? I'd like to buy some land there, settle down, maybe erect a church and save a couple million people with my sermons.

Atlantis, as the story goes, was a realm of divine origin but in a terrible day and night of floods and earthquakes, splendid Atlantis was swallowed by the sea, sinking into legend, and ever since folk have been trying to find it.

The 20th century has been hard on Atlantis dreams. Detailed mapping of the sea floor and the new theory of plate tectonics make it clear, geophysicists say, that land masses resembling Atlantis never existed in the Atlantic.

I hope the geophysicists are wrong. I hope somebody finds Atlantis. I hope it's not a myth, not a legend, not a fable or fairy tale. Maybe some of you world traveling Wedgewoodians, and you know who you are---maybe one of you will find Atlantis and maybe you'll take your pastor to this underwater paradise. Maybe we could go to Atlantis right after stopping off at the fountain of youth.

Doesn't paradise sound good?

Today's scripture lesson is about magi on a search. To be sure, they weren't searching for the fountain of youth or Atlantis. Instead, they were searching for a child. Maybe they were wise.

As we approach Epiphany, I want to ask you this important question, What are you searching for?

Most of us are searching for something, some place, or someone.

Last Sunday a Wedgewoodian told us about his search for a partner and the joy of finding him. Another Wedgewoodian told us about the search for her father, a relationship with him, and how one day he said, "I miss you. I can't wait to see you. I love you." Thank God sometimes we find what we are searching for.

What searches of yours have been successful?

What searches of yours have you given up on?

Perhaps you feel like most people did in the California gold rush. Some 300,000 people went to California searching for gold. Those early gold-seekers, called "forty-niners," traveled by sailing ship and in covered wagons across the continent, often facing substantial hardships on the trip. Gold, worth billions of today's dollars, was recovered leading to great wealth for a few----for a few; many, however,-----many returned home from their search with little more than they started with.

Where is the fountain of youth? Where is Atlantis? Where is California gold? How many more times will our searches turn out to be useless? And what about this child, the Savior of the world, the prince of peace? Is that just another down the drain, why did I waste my time?, mark it up as lesson learned search?

Just this week in Pakistan Benazir Bhutto is killed. Pakistan could use a prince of peace right now.

Just this week Hindu extremists torched nearly a dozen churches and the home of a Christian leader. Christians retaliated by setting fire to several homes belonging to Hindus. One person has been killed.

And this month there was the Annapolis Summit, another jab at peace in the Middle East. Do you know how complicated arriving at that peace is? Secretary of State Condi Rice's task is nearly impossible. First, you've got centuries of history of bad blood. Second, there are wide gaps on core issues that have blocked peace for decades: a future for Palestinian refugees, the sharing of Jerusalem, the dismantlement of settlements in the occupied Bank, and a final border. When Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas try to negotiate past these stubborn, emotionally charged barriers, each must contend with furious domestic opposition. And parties absent from Annapolis – Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas – have a proven capacity to upset the peace process. Russia, eager to regain influence in the region, is offering to host talks between Israel and Syria early next year in Moscow, further complicating the Israeli-Palestinian peace venture. And to top it all off, Secretary of State Rice faces stiff challenges in her own political party. Vice President Dick Cheney, for one, has never assigned top priority to the Middle East peace process. And within the Republican Party, Rice's mission has drawn strong opposition from two of Bush's most loyal constituencies: the Christian Right and hawkish Jews. Neither group believes that by giving up territory, Israel will gain peace.

Where, would somebody tell me, where is this Savior of the World, the prince of peace. We need him!

Peace getting complicated, listen to this. In a town in scenic southwestern Colorado homeowners are battling over whether a Christmas wreath that includes a peace sign is an anti-Iraq war protest or even a promotion of Satan. Lisa Jensen, the homeowner, and by the way a past President of the Homeowner's association, said she put up the wreath to honor the biblical call for peace and goodwill toward men. She said she and her husband hung the wreath on their outside wall Nov. 15 and plan to leave the wreath and all of her other Christmas decorations up until after Dec. 25. The association will fine Jensen \$25 a day for everyday it remains up. She calculates that will cost her about \$1,000.

And then there's the video game version of Left Behind in which you and your Christian militia roam through the streets of a post-apocalyptic New York City killing United Nations forces who are the bad guys. I'm not making this up. And after you complete a kill, your video game character prays in order to clean its soul.

Have you heard the story from World War I about British and German soldiers coming out of the trenches on Christmas Day and singing "Silent Night" together. Anyone think the Taliban and al Qaeda are going to sing "Silent Night" with us?

Where is this child?

On that first Christmas Jesus was born in Roman controlled territory in Judea. The Israelites were a conquered, dominated people living under the imperial rule of the pax romana, the so-called peace of Rome. The insurgency was led by dagger-men, known as *sicarii*, who carried out assassinations against both Roman soldiers and Jews who were deemed to be too cooperative with Rome. (Rev. Thom Belote, Minister of the Shawnee Mission Unitarian Universalist Church in Overland Park, KS)

They needed to find the child as much as we do.

Ironically, much of the world's violence is due to its religions. For the Christians' part, the prince of peace gets turned into the prince of war. The Savior of the world gets turned into only those are saved who are Christians and sign the dogma dotted line. Ironic, isn't it?

Some years ago "Saturday Night Live" did a little skit called "How Hanukkah Harry Saved Christmas" and it actually had a nice message in it. It is Christmas Eve and Santa has come down with a serious stomach virus. He can't keep any food down and he is confined to bed. Unfortunately, he's not going to be able to make his annual global trek to deliver gifts and toys to all the good little girls and boys. Mrs. Claus suggests that he send the elves in his stead, but Santa says they don't possess the magic to complete the job in the brief midnight hours before Christmas morning.

Ah, but Santa has a bright idea. He picks up the phone and makes a long distance call from the North Pole to Hanukkah Harry on Mt. Sinai. Harry is getting ready to deliver gifts and toys to all the Jewish children during their eight day Festival of Light. Hanukkah Harry definitely has the magic and is only too glad to help Santa out in a pinch by delivering toys to all the Gentile girls and boys.

Like Santa, Harry has a prominent beard, except his is thin and gray, and he wears a blue and white cap and carries a blue and white sack with an embroidered Mennorah on it. He takes off into the air with his simple horse drawn wagon and chants: "On Mersha, on Hershel, on Schlomo".

I hope somebody finds Atlantis and the fountain of youth. I hope they are not myths, not legends, not fables or fairy tales. But mostly I hope you and I are asking, Where is this child? Because the world needs peace, your workplace needs peace, your church needs peace, your extended family needs peace, your home needs peace, your marriage or relationship needs peace, your inner being needs peace.

Where is this child?

You know, I'm thinking for the sake of peace I need to forgive Warren Tadlock for suggesting I wear basketball shoes.

Poems read during the worship service.

Walking Meditation

Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk

Take my hand.
We will walk.
We will only walk.

We will enjoy our walk
without thinking of arriving anywhere.
Walk peacefully.
Walk happily.
Our walk is a peace walk.
Our walk is a happiness walk.

Then we learn
that there is no peace walk;
that peace is the walk;
that there is no happiness walk;
that happiness is the walk.
We walk for ourselves.
We walk for everyone
always hand in hand.

Walk and touch peace every moment.
Walk and touch happiness every moment.
Each step brings a fresh breeze.
Each step makes a flower bloom under our feet.
Kiss the Earth with your feet.
Print on Earth your love and happiness.

Earth will be safe
when we feel in us enough safety.

The Peace of Wild Things
Wendell Berry

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Sakhi 57: Of Peace

Kabir, mystic poet of India

Formerly my heart was a crow
Which used to kill the birds,
Now my heart has become a swan
That pecks and eats pearls one by one.