



CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

CHRISTMAS/EPIPHANY 2022 | Vol. 148 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

What Did They See?

By the Rev. Candice Wassell

We know exactly what the Magi brought to Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But what did they see that created such a stark contrast in their **before and after** experience?

You'll recall that on the way to Mary and the Christ Child, they had an encounter with King Herod, the brutal ruler of Judea. Matthew 2:3 says Herod "was frightened" by the news of Jesus' birth.

We know from experience that

there is perhaps nothing more dangerous than fearful, insecure people with a lot of power in their hands, present world leaders included. The same was certainly the case with Herod, as his fear turned murderous. He sent the Magi to find Jesus for the purpose of silencing what he perceived was a threat to his power.

That was the **before** experience for the Magi. When the Magi set off with Herod's orders, we have no idea what they were going to do. And things being what they are in this broken world, it's

fair to assume that they set off thinking they would do what they needed to do to stay out of trouble with Herod.

Now what about the **after** experience? The final sentence of Matthew Chapter 2 says, "[T]hey left for their own country by another road." They left by *another* road. They were set on a course by Herod but departed from that course in the end.

What happened? What changed? Jesus didn't say anything to them. Nor are we told that Mary said anything either. The only thing that happened to them is that they "saw the child" (Mt 2:11).

That's it. They saw Jesus.

But we who follow a crucified Lord know what they saw. A hope carried in the "now in flesh appearing" child. A hope that a cross would one day cradle the sins of the world—theirs included. It was enough to make them change course, as it is enough for all those who grasp the promise of Christ crucified.

How is this possible they had a hope of the cross without yet having experienced it?

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PIETER BRUEGHEL THE YOUNGER, ADORATION OF THE MAGI / ALAMY PHOTO

Message from the Executive Director

Thanks to You!

For Crossings, 2022 has been a busy year! We've hosted more events, involving more people than ever. A host of new writers have added their insights to our weekly text studies and Thursday Theology.

All of this was possible because you and others have provided generous financial support. You helped Crossings meet a \$25,000 challenge match from Mark and Kathy Helge. That outpouring of contributions has underwritten the planning and groundwork for the January 23-25, 2023, Conference in Belleville, Illinois. With a remarkable line-up of speakers, we're sure to see many new faces at this year's conference.

For the first time, the conference will be fully streamed, so many others around the country—and abroad—will be able to participate.

Several new projects are well along toward being launched in the new year. With your involvement and support in 2023, Crossings will continue its bold witness to the Gospel. Thank you for enabling Crossings to invite so many others to make full use of Christ's benefits.



Sherman Lee
Executive Director

What Did They See?

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There's a painting I have in mind but cannot place, perhaps you know it. I doubt it's well-known or highly regarded or else I would have been able to find it through a google search (I could not!). What I can remember of it is this: Adolescent Jesus is in the foreground doing something trivial. While

“We just know what the realization of the cross does in our lives.”

Mary is kneeling in the middle ground, back to the observer, she is going through a trunk containing the gifts of the Magi. In the background, a shadow is cast on the wall of their home. The shadows cast by Jesus, the trunk, and Mary create an unmistakable crucifix. It's a literal foreshadow, and it makes me wonder if such a foreshadowing existed in

the hearts of the Magi.

We don't know what they saw or what visions they'd been given. We just know what the realization of the cross does in our lives. It does for us what it does for the Magi, who choose another road in response to Jesus. It may only be a shadow of the promise at this point in their journey. But this Son will rise to enlighten their lives. That is the hope of Epiphany: That shadows of understanding come to the fullness of light and understanding for all people.



Rev. Candice Wassell

Our guest columnist for this issue is the Rev. Candice Wassell. She is sr. pastor at Faith Lutheran Church in O'Fallon, Illinois, and served with Sherman Lee as Crossings co-executive director from 2017 to 2019.

God Is Up to Something

The Rev. James Brooks was a 2020 Crossings conference speaker. “God is up to something” was the refrain Brooks repeatedly used in his presentation to us. The refrain is rooted in the preaching advice he received from his father. Brooks’ father, who was also the Rev. James Brooks, admonished his son, “Never leave Jesus in the tomb.”

From the smile on Brooks’ face to the enthusiasm in his voice, his hearers know that the something God is up to is identical to what many of us refer to as Christ’s benefits, how those benefits change our lives, and how we make use of them, in the words of Crossings co-founder Ed Schroeder, as God’s mercy managers.

When Brooks addressed the Crossings conference, he was the senior pastor at Harmony Community Church as well as the chief ministry officer at Lawndale Christian Health Center (LCHC). Both are in Chicago’s Lawndale neighborhood. Brooks provided spiritual care to the staff and patients at LCHC. As he interacted more and more with the surrounding community, his job title changed to vice president for mission and community engagement.

In January 2022 Brooks was elected CEO of LCHC. He is the third CEO in LCHC’s 40-year history. LCHC had humble beginnings. In the 1970s, high school students at Farragut Career Academy, a public high school in Chicago, gathered for Bible study with one of their teachers, Wayne Gordon.

That Bible study led to the founding of Lawndale Christian Church. Out of the church grew Lawndale Christian Health Center, Lawndale Christian Legal Center, and Lawndale Christian Development Corporation. Although they are



Lawndale Christian Health Center (LCHC) in Chicago, where the Rev. James Brooks serves as CEO.

incorporated separately, the CEOs of each ministry meet as a cabinet.

Today LCHC has 615 employees with clinics in seven locations, a health and fitness center, an urban farm, and The Green Tomato Café. The café offers an alternative to the fried fast food which dominates the community. LCHC believes its employees should live where they serve. Brooks and his wife Jackie live on the same block as Harmony Church and just around the corner from LCHC.

In 2021, LCHC served almost 70,000 patients—almost a third of them uninsured. Ninety-three percent of patients live below the poverty line. LCHC offers primary care, dentistry, optometry, behavioral health, substance use services, and in 2021 delivered 675 babies.

This year saw the start of a family medicine residency program. Over three years, six residents will be matched with LCHC so that by 2024 they
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“... the something God is up to is what many of us refer to as Christ’s benefits, how those benefits change our lives, and how we make use of them...”

God Is Up to Something

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will have 18 residents. LCHC partners with two nearby hospitals, Mount Sinai and St. Anthony.

Brooks personal story shows us God's mercy at work. When Brooks' beloved older brother died, he was overwhelmed with grief. He dropped out of college, giving up a basketball scholarship. He became a guard at an Illinois prison for juveniles.

At the prison, Brooks saw many young men from his Lawndale neighborhood arriving weekly. He left his job to return to his neighborhood as a youth advocate with the Westside Association for Community Action.

Brooks, the youth advocate, became a youth pastor when he accepted a call to be the youth minister at Grace Lutheran Church

and School in River Forest, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. During these eight years, he completed his bachelor's degree at Concordia University Chicago. He also began course work at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. In the midst of all this, he completed a youth ministry certificate program at Princeton Seminary.

After a summer course at Northern Seminary in Chicago, Brooks was awarded the John Perkins Fellowship. He resigned his position at Grace and completed his MDiv at Northern Seminary.

Brooks has always been bi-vocational. In underserved communities, most pastors are bi-vocational by necessity. The churches cannot support full-time



Rev. James Brooks

staff. Brooks remains the senior pastor at Harmony Community Church. He nurtures teams of volunteers to carry out the church's ministry. Brooks preaches almost every Sunday. He says preaching keeps him grounded and energizes him for ministry. Brooks embodies Crossings emphasis, crossing the Gospel with daily life. At Harmony Church and LCHC, he is known as Pastor Brooks.

Crossings Book Group Continues Zoom Meetings

The Crossings book group is reading and discussing *Low Anthropology: The Unlikely Key to a Gracious View of Others (and Yourself)*, by David Zahl. He is the founder and director of Mockingbird Ministries. Zahl has been a keynote speaker at two Crossings conferences.

The Rev. Dr. Chris Repp leads the discussion. Repp says this is a good time to join the group since they have just started reading Zahl's book.

The group meets every other Thursday via Zoom. Contact Repp at acrepp@gmail.com for more information.

Repp said, "This group has helped me to read books I have been wanting to read but haven't made the time for. Through the readings and discussion, my ministry and my soul have been enriched. I hope you'll consider joining."



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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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