

Rock'in and Roll'in to the Child

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 1/6/2019

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Wausaukee, WI

Back in the early to mid 60's, it was my brother who introduced me to a new American institution called, American Bandstand. Anything my older brother did must have been cool, so when he plopped down on the sofa to watch, I did the same. Although, there were a couple of times when he didn't want me in the room, either because he was watching with a girl (yuck!) or was practicing some dance moves and didn't want me to watch.

Anyway, watching American Bandstand was a habit of mine that continued through my high school years. What we kids from central Wisconsin saw happen on American Bandstand are what we eventually did at our local sock-hops and school dances.

Part of the reason why I was drawn to American Bandstand was not only because it was my brother's choice, but because of the kids on the show.

They were so different from me. For one thing, the kids looked different than the kids I hung out with – from as far back as I can remember, the show was racially integrated and, unlike me; the clothes they wore were cool, so different than mine. They sounded different too. When Dick Clark gathered some of the kids around him to Rate-a Record, they had an accent from the east-coast.

I knew they were from Philadelphia, but they might well have been from Persia.

There is the same kind of exotic part of Matthew's story of the Magi.

Part of the point of the wise men is that even the gentiles will come from afar to bow down and worship the king of the Jews – but they guys were not your everyday gentiles coming off the bus.

Call them what you want: magi, scientists, wise men, astrologers, magicians from the East, carrying gold and perfumes. When they waltzed into Jerusalem asking for the newborn king of the Jews, Herod and the Pharisees couldn't have been more flabbergasted if it were Smokey Robinson and The Miracles.

But should it have been that much of a surprise? Isaiah had announced that "all the nations" would stream to the Lord's mountain. But nobody was thinking they'd come with horoscopes and weird spices and some other religion.

But it all fits Matthew's gospel, that God honors all the old commandments and promises – "not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law" – but fulfills them in ways nobody ever expected.

After all, Matthew opens his Gospel by inserting 5 women's names into an otherwise normal genealogy – by the way, 3 of the 5 names were gentile women.

Over the centuries, the church changed the story of the magi into being kings, and Christians decided that there were three of them. We have even given them different colors, ethnicities, and names.

All these details that have accrued to the magi over the centuries invite you and me to imagine the unimaginable: that the God of Israel has in generosity turned the face of mercy toward all the nations. And that Magi from the East and people from Philadelphia or Wisconsin Rapids can come to Mount Zion and learn God's ways.

In other words, the story of the magi cracks open the story of "Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" to let us see that there is a place there for those who are near and even for those who come from afar.

No wonder, then, that Herod and his bunch get excited when the wise men show up and ask about the King of the Jews. The question suggests a different kind of ruler and a wider and a more gracious kingdom than the one represented by Herod.

In Christmas pageants all around the world, little kids and adults put on bathrobes and cardboard

Rock'in and Roll'in to the Child

crowns and made their way down the church aisle to Bethlehem, imagining themselves to be a part of the great story of Jesus Christ. I think they're onto something.