

Do You Have a Moment of Time?  
Sermon for Epiphany  
Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

A light shines from Bethlehem that illuminates the whole world. The wisemen from the East gather around the manger together with many people from all nations. They spare no time or effort for they have discovered the light of the world in Christ. We also gather around the manger in the new year to start the new year with Christ. Like the wisemen from the East, we want to take our time and make the long journey to the manger. However, it isn't easy for us to pause and let the significance of Jesus' light sink in. Many other topics push into our everyday lives and worries are never far away. We notice that it isn't easy for us to pause and let the rays of Christmas affect us. Perhaps this is because we have a fundamental problem with time. The book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament therefore helps us take a second look. It helps us to pause and reflect on how the light of Christmas can also shine into our everyday life. So listen to the sermon text for today from Ecclesiastes 3:1-15:

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup> a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; <sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. <sup>9</sup> What gain has the worker from his toil? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>11</sup> He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. <sup>12</sup> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God's gift to man. <sup>14</sup> I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before Him. <sup>15</sup> That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.*

God has spread our time out before us like a table laden with food. We can decide for ourselves what we do or don't do with our time. We find many offerings on our full table but there can also be an oversupply. We don't have to eat everything that's on the table, otherwise we could end up with a stomachache, just like at Christmas dinner. So it's important that we make a selection. We have to deal with time in the same way that we normally deal with a healthy diet. The interesting thing is that we are getting smarter and smarter about making better use of our time. In the past, people tortured themselves for hours by washing laundry by hand with a washboard. Today, a machine can wash and dry the laundry all at once. It's similar with all the other tasks we have to do. I typed my first written assignments on a mechanical typewriter; then, with great effort, I corrected the mistakes with white-out strips. Today, the whole process is done by computer, which even checks the errors and sends the written document to the ends of the earth within seconds. With so many technical resources, we should actually have a lot of time on our hands these days. Unfortunately, this is not the case! On the contrary, the more technical tools we have, the less time we have. However, this is not due to the technical tools but to the fact that so many things have been added that take up our time. The offers and obligations that come our way have also multiplied a hundredfold! That's why it's all the more important that we treat time like food. In other words, we should think carefully about what is put on the table and what is not. Some offers that are thrust upon us seem extraordinarily attractive. But when we use them, we don't even realize that they are not good, but rather that they want to trap us in their demands and put us under pressure or manipulate us. We are now so bombarded by such offers that they exceed our capabilities and we are overwhelmed by the abundance. That is why it is all the more important to think about time. Thinking about time is nothing new. The wise King Solomon also thought about time. Solomon didn't yet know about the overabundance of activities as we know them today. However, he had a keen sense of the fact that we can't be in two places at once. "For everything there is a season," he writes in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes and then describes the

following activities, for example: **“there is a time to plant, a time to break down, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to embrace, a time to let go...”**

In all of this, it seems important that we dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to the task that God is giving us at the moment, and that is extremely difficult for us. We cannot devote ourselves to the present moment because we are already looking ahead to the next moment or longing for this moment to be overtaken by another. We want to get away from the present moment and be in the next moment. Imagine the following situation: I’m sitting on the train and a person sits down right next to me and talks incessantly about their strawberry farm, which is of no interest to me at all. How slowly time moves in such situations and how much I would like to be in the next moment! How often do we find ourselves in situations where we don’t feel comfortable or want to change time so that it goes faster? Or want to be in a different time? Some people even get sick or depressed because they aren’t satisfied with life as it is right now. They would rather be in someone else’s place or have a different life, to live in a different time, and to always long for a time that is better than the current one. Epiphany is about something hidden being revealed to us. God calls us out of the darkness and lets us see His light. This calling that God gives us calls us out of time so that our dull everyday life is framed by God’s calling. This is often nothing spectacular. On the contrary, it is as normal as the birth of Jesus was. It seems to me that we modern people are no longer good at dealing with normal things of time. We allow ourselves to be driven by the media so that we think that time must always be filled with things that satisfy the senses or are special. But God has a different time. Time in the here and now is framed by eternity. God makes time and when we know this, time takes on a very special value. It is firmly anchored in eternity. But God not only remains in His time, He also enters our time. He did this through Jesus Christ. And when the wisemen stood in front of the manger with the shepherds and Mary and Joseph, eternity came into our time. This is exactly what happens every time people get to know Jesus. When a person is touched by the Gospel and is baptized, God holds this time firmly in His hands. The time remains forever because God does not forget! He takes us into His heart! And what He has promised us through baptism remains in His heart for all eternity. This makes the time we experience in the here and now extraordinary and, in the truest sense, supernatural. Then, as Ecclesiastes says, we can see eternity in the very normal things such as living and dying, growing and withering, mourning and laughing. In the Epiphany season, it is not important that we discover the extraordinary in itself, but the extraordinary in ordinary life. The person who flies into space or achieves some other extraordinary achievement is not extraordinary. It is the ordinary father or mother who works a sometimes boring job to put food on the table for their family. What is exceptional is not just the person who does amazingly well in their academics, but also the person who deals with their alcohol addiction. What is extraordinary is not the glittering love stories in the tabloids, but what is extraordinary is the person who has to deal with the mistakes of his or her partner.

As the new year turns, we want to discover the wonder of Christ in our normal lives and marvel at Him. There are many things we can think about – there is laughter as well as weeping; there is confidence as well as worry and sadness. We can’t do all of these at the same time, but we can always know Christ who is in us and around us. Then we can face the times as they are with confidence and hope. Above all, we can love the time that God gives us with all our hearts and not be constantly nervous that we are missing out on something. When sadness is the order of the day, don’t mourn the laughter, and when laughter is called for, don’t let the joy be crowded out by unnecessary worries. God Himself holds us and our time close to His heart! And this time does not pass. God holds on to it so that it can never disappear. And if we know all this, we can also place our fleeting time in God’s hands. We can use the time in 2024 as God wants us to. St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:16 to “[make] the best use of the time!” Jesus Christ, who Himself is firmly rooted in eternity, showed in His life what this means. He constantly placed what He experienced in the present time into the eternal framework – into God’s heart. He often prayed for hours and thus knew that the moment was tied into eternity. We are grateful for the good things that God has given us in the past year, but we also place in His hands what worries us for the new year, the coming time, the problems and challenges that await us. We entrust everything to God. I don’t have time! That’s not an excuse. Such a thing only exists for those who know nothing about eternity! Amen.