

"LET GO OF YOUR CRUTCH"*{Matthew 2:1-12}*Trinity Presbyterian ChurchJanuary 6, 2008

Gian Carlo Menotti wrote his famous opera, *"Amahl, and the Night Visitors"* in 1951. The story is one of my favorites and especially appropriate on this Epiphany Sunday.

Amahl is a young shepherd boy prone to exaggeration—as most young boys his age. His mother had great difficulty distinguishing truth from error which caused her great anguish from time to time. If only he would tell the truth.

Amahl was lame and used a crutch when he walked. He also played a shepherd's flute-like pipe.

On one particular night as Amahl was wrapped in his heavy cloak he was playing on his pipe and noted among the thousands of stars in the sky there was one that burned brighter than all the others and he couldn't take his eyes off of it.

THE STAR

Soon his mother called for him to come into their humble house for it was time for him to go to bed. He was captivated by the brightness of this unusual star and came in somewhat reluctantly.

"What was keeping you outside?" his mother asked.

Amahl filled with excitement replied he limped to her side, *"Oh, mother, you should go out and see! There's never been such a sky! Hanging over our roof there is a star as large as a window. The star has a tail, and it moves across the sky like a chariot of fire!"*

You can only try to imagine his mother's consternation: *"Oh, Amahl, when will you stop telling lies? All day long you wander about in a dream. Here we are with nothing to eat, not a stick of wood on the fire, not a drop of oil in the jug, and all you do is worry your mother with fairy tales."*

With her hands on her hips she scolded him, *"Have you forgotten your promise never, never to lie to your mother again?"*

But Amahl persisted, *"Mother, I'm not lying! Please believe me!"*

He did his utmost to persuade his mother to peer out the window, but she refused and replied: *"Stop bothering me! Why should I believe you? You come at me with a new one every day! First it was a leopard with a woman's head. Then it was a tree branch that shrieked and bled. Then it was a fish as big as a boat, with whiskers like a cat and wings like a bat and horns like a*

goat! And now, it's a star as large as a window—or was it a carriage? And, if that wasn't enough, the star has a tail, and the tail is made of fire!"

She was convinced that his hunger had gone to his head.

Their cupboards were bare—their money was gone—everything they had once owned had been sold—they were penniless...and destitute! She could see only one solution—become beggars...or die!

Beggar? Amahl was not beyond that. He replied: *"If we must go begging, a good beggar I'll be! I'll play sweet tunes to set people dancing. We'll walk and walk from village to town, you dressed as a gypsy and I as a clown...I'll play my pipe, you'll sing and you'll shout. The windows will open and people will lean out. The king will ride by and hear your loud voice and throw us some gold to stop all the noise..."* ...and then...he went to sleep in his mother's arms without supper...and she gently laid him on a small straw mat with his crutch nearby...and covered him with his cloak.

THE THREE KINGS

Amahl is awakened by the voices approaching their home singing...

[Cut #6—PLAY FIRST 1:10...TO WORDS "MY CRYSTAL STAR"]

Amahl reached for his crutch and hobbled to the window...and he watched as a magnificent caravan approached their humble home.

...three stately camels

...carrying three richly dressed men

...they passed his window...and then...stopped.

They knocked at the door and Amahl's mother told him to go and see who was there.

[Cuts #7 and #8]

HOSPITALITY EXTENDED TO THE THREE KINGS

The three kings and their page enter the humble abode. Their names are Kaspar, the deaf king, Balthazar, the black king, and King Melchior.

Amahl's mother scurries outside to try to find some wood to build a fire and during her absence he takes advantage of the time to query the kings...*"Are you a real king? Have you regal blood? Can I see it?" {He's told that it's just like his!} "What's the use of having it then? Where is your home?"*

When asked about himself, Amahl responds...*"I was a shepherd...I had a flock of sheep, but my mother sold them. Now there are no sheep left. I had a black goat who gave me warm, sweet milk, but she died of old age, and now there is no goat left!"*

He proceeds to question the other two kings and notes that Kaspar, the deaf king has a parrot and again he asks many questions. He asks the Kaspar if the parrot talks to which he responds: *"Does he talk, how do I know?"*

He then notes that each king has a box and insists on asking more questions and Kaspar responds... [CUT #11]

TELL THE NEIGHBORS

His mother returns and is chagrined to see that Amahl is such a nuisance to their distinguished visitors. After scolding him...again...she tells him to go and call the shepherds and to ask them to bring whatever they have in their houses because they have nothing to offer.

It is then that she sees the gleaming coffer of gold and the rich chalices of myrrh and incense spread out before the kings. [Cut #13]

"What does this child look like?"

The kings respond: *"Have you seen a child the color of wheat, the color of dawn? His eyes are mild, and his hands are those of a king. We are bringing incense, myrrh, and gold to Him, and the Eastern Star is our guide!"*

The woman is convinced they must be referring to Amahl.

But Melchior responded: *"The Child we seek holds the seas and the winds on His palm."*

And Kaspar added: *"The child we seek has the moon and the stars at His feet."*

And Balthazar said: *"Before Him the eagle is gentle, the lion is meek!"*

She is even more convinced they are speaking of her own, Amahl.

It is then that Amahl returns with the shepherds...[CUT #15]...and they were overwhelmed by the sight of these kings...and they offered them their delicacies... [CUT #16]

Amahl's mother then urges the shepherds to dance for the kings...and Amahl reached for his pipe and began to play along with an elderly man and the shepherds began to dance joyfully for the kings.

After some time Balthazar thanks the shepherds for their dancing and warm hospitality...the shepherds depart singing...and Amahl asks a Kaspar a moving question... [CUT #19—FADE MUSIC WHILE I SPEAK AT 1:39 FOR ONE MINUTE]

TEMPTATION OF AMAHL'S MOTHER

Soon everyone is asleep...except Amahl's mother who thinks to herself...*"All that gold! I wonder if rich people know what to do with their gold? Do the rich know how a child could be fed? Do they know that a house can be kept warm all day with burning logs? Do they know how to roast sweet corn on the fire, how to milk a clover-fed goat, how to spice hot wine on cold winter nights? Oh, what I could do for my child with that gold! Why should it all go to a child they don't even know?"*

She slowly crept over towards the riches and thought: *"They are asleep! Do I dare? If I take some, they'll never miss it!"*

As she reached out to take some gold the page awoke and cries out...

[CUT #21]

...and in the midst of the commotion Amahl wakes and shouts: *“Don’t you dare hurt my mother! I’ll smash in your face! I’ll knock out your teeth! Don’t you dare hurt my mother! I’ll break all your bones! I’ll bash in your head!”*

KEEP THE GOLD...AND THE MIRACLE

[CUTS #23-24-25-26]

CONCLUSION

And so, Amahl joins the three kings on their journey for the Christ Child...!

...no longer lame

...no longer in need of his crutches

...he goes to worship the new born king

As we begin 2008, it’s time for all of us to let go of our crutches of the past...for in Christ...the old things pass away and all things become new!

...what are you clinging to that you need to release to God today?

...what is your crutch that is holding you back and keeping you lame?

It was the writer of Hebrews who wrote...

“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders [our crutches] and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...!”

And so, dear friends, fix your eyes upon Jesus...give Him your crutches and we begin a new year.