

**WELCOME/INTRODUCTION TO AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS; 1/8-11/15;
THOMAS H. YORTY; WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Good evening, I am Tom Yorty, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church. It is my pleasure to welcome you to tonight's production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. We are grateful to Nickel City Opera and Matt Marco for presenting *Amahl* here and reviving what was an annual tradition that started many years ago under our then Music Director Thomas Swan. Your program notes provide interesting information about this 20th century American classic commissioned by and written for NBC television in 1951.

Gian Carlo Menotti, the composer, was still searching for an idea for his opera as the time for its debut on national television approached. Then, one day, as Menotti was walking through the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he noticed Hieronymous Bosch's 16th century painting, "The Adoration of the Magi." Menotti instantly knew what his opera would be about.

Having grown up in Italy, Menotti was not familiar with Santa Claus. In Italy, the Wise Men are the ones who bring gifts at Christmas. This fond memory of childhood undoubtedly fed Menotti's attraction to the painting and inspired the plot for his opera.

But in addition to those charming details of the production itself there is another layer of meaning to this ancient story of the three Wise Men. The tradition of celebrating the visit of the three kings goes back to the fourth century.

The early church recognized the occasion – described in the Gospel of Matthew – as the first time Christ was revealed to the Gentiles. In other words, the three Wise Men are identified by this story as the first Gentiles – outside of Jesus' Jewish family and culture – to believe in Christ.

As many ancient nativity myths of gods and heroes do, the story of the Wise Men previews the meaning and significance of the life Christ would live. Jesus' message to love God and serve one's neighbor would transcend its Hebrew origins and reach to the farthest corners of the earth.

The name given to this mythical story by the early church is "Epiphany." The word comes from an ancient Greek verb meaning "to show forth" or "manifest."

The word "epiphany" has a robust use in our common language. We say we had an "epiphany" which means the "light bulb" in our head goes on and we 'get' or 'see' something, that until that moment, had eluded us.

Surely great art and music is about helping us see the world in a new way, under a new light. Whether it's the Bible or a painting at the Albright Knox or a poem by our own Carl Dennis *there are* occasions when the art or music or words lift us out of the daily grind and help us see a bigger, better picture of the world we live in.

The light bulb that went on for the Wise Men was literally the North Star; their recognition that the infant Christ was the one long awaited by a world in turmoil was their epiphany.

The state of the world hasn't changed much since the three visitors came from the East. My hunch is more than a few world leaders, not to mention some of us, could use an epiphany or two. In addition to the excellence of the performance that's what we hope you'll find here tonight.

Welcome to Westminster and *Amahl!*