

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 3rd 2016

The Epiphany of the Lord

This feast touches me deeply. This is the feast of the epiphany - the showing or manifestation - of Jesus to the rest of the world. The promises of God to the people of the first covenant always included the promise that their special and gifted relationship with God would extend to the ends of the earth. No one could have imagined how that would happen.

We all love the Nativity story through the eyes of Luke. This story, through the eyes of Matthew, introduces us to Magi - astrologer types, who are really seers, or "wise men" in the sense that they are seeking wisdom with open minds and hearts. They are clearly non-Jews. They follow what catches their attention and learn from it. And, we are introduced to the first Herod - the bad leader, who is the father of the Herod we will meet in the Passion story.

The Magi pay attention to the stars and when they see something special, they sense there is meaning in that event. Too often we aren't that open to see a new light, a new message, a clear call, to pay attention. The Magi follow the light. Their following leads them to an encounter with Herod. Their consulting with him leads them to Bethlehem, where the light has settled. We sometimes fail to consult the tradition and learn where to go to find the light. Unfortunately, the Herod they meet is also very duplicitous. He's two-faced, with a divided, selfish, jealous heart. He isn't interested in finding the new light. He wants to suppress it - to destroy it. At times, we are guilty of duplicity ourselves - or at least our hearts can be divided. We want to follow, but we are something threatened or fearful of losing something we want to hold on to. At our worst, we can even suppress or destroy the light.

The Magi find the Holy Family. They come prepared to do this newborn homage. They bring gifts for a king, for a God, for someone who will suffer. They thought about this. Too often, we don't come to this invitation to see the light with any gifts which represent our faith. And, so we don't proclaim with our lives that we believe Jesus is our Lord and God, that he is the one who, in this gospel story, will die for our sins. We can only imagine what Mary and Joseph experienced in this revelation to those far away Magi and to the gifts they bring to honor this child of theirs.

The wise Magi have it revealed to them not to go back to Herod to report that they found the newborn king. Even without help, they must have sensed Herod's insincerity - and the danger that was hidden behind his pseudo piety. They went back home by a different route - so often the result of a transformative experience. Our encounter with Jesus these days - with the light he shines into our darkness - can lead us to continue on our life journey by a different and new path.

When we seek, find and honor Jesus' gift to us, our gratitude fills us with joy. And, that joy, and our way home, is different. It is new. It is renewed with a deep trust that God is with us. God can redeem, bring mercy and healing, reconciliation and redemption, to every evil - light to every darkness.

This year's epiphany of his many mercies to us - in the beginning of the Year of Mercy - can help guide us for the rest of our journey. How blessed our life can be because it has been made known to us that there is a light for our darkness! In the midst of the "thick clouds" covering us - our family and friends; our countries; our world - "the Lord shines."

Lord, Jesus, you show us the way to you, to the joy of the fullness of life. Continue to reveal to us the power of your mercy, to heal us, to allow us to be the light of your mercy for others. May our mercy toward others reveal your presence with us. May our mercy heal divisions and bring unity and peace, which nothing else in the world can bring. May our mercy allow us to journey past our indifference so we may be able to weep with those who weep. May our mercy lead to solidarity with those on the margins of the gifts of your creation. May our mercy bring the revelation of your desires for your whole people, a kingdom of mercy and justice, a kingdom that restores integrity and right relationships among us. May your light shine on us, within us, from us, in union with your Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

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