

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY ~ 02 JANUARY 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Note: See the images of the Epiphany, each one with its own uniqueness – the lupins, the wise ones who are Sisters of Mercy, the Cameroon images, the wise women, the gifts of fruit, the journey in darkness!

Journey ~ Light ~ Inclusion ~ Gifts ~ Rejoicing ~ Journey (by another road) – these threads shimmer through our four readings this morning as we celebrate the feast of Epiphany.



**Adoration of the Magi,
Emmanuel Tzanes**

The story begins with a **journey** – in the first reading from Isaiah 60, the journey is the return to Judah after the exile in Babylon, a journey long awaited and completed by the new generation not the generation which had gone into exile. There have been two journeys leading up to the Gospel story – Mary and Joseph have journeyed to Bethlehem for the census and the birth of Jesus. The shepherds, who are Jews (as are Joseph, Mary and Jesus), have journeyed from their hillside to see the newborn child. Now a group of wise ones (we do not know the number), who are not Jews but Gentiles, have come from the East to find that same newborn child. Our Western Christian Church has assigned them the names Melchior (a Babylonian scholar), Caspar (a Persian scholar), and Balthazar (an Arab scholar).

The word “**epiphany**” comes from the Greek word ἐπιφάνεια (*epipháneia*), meaning manifestation or appearance or revelation. While it is not used in the Gospel story, by the fourth century, Epiphany became the name of this story of

the revealing of the coming of Jesus to the Gentiles and linking Jesus’ birth and baptism. The story shows us the diverse ways in which God’s presence is revealed to us: through the book of God’s creation, through our dreams, through learning from our own and others’ experiences, and through the voice of the Scriptures.

John Philip Newell echoes for us the words of the great Irish teacher John Scotus Eriugena who taught that God speaks to us through two books. One is the little book, he says, the book of scripture, physically little. The other is the big book, the book of creation, vast as the universe. Just as God speaks to us through the words of scripture, so God speaks to us through the elements of creation. The cosmos is like a living sacred text that we can learn to read and interpret.

Veronica Lawson rsm reminds us that being attentive to God’s presence has more to do with a way c

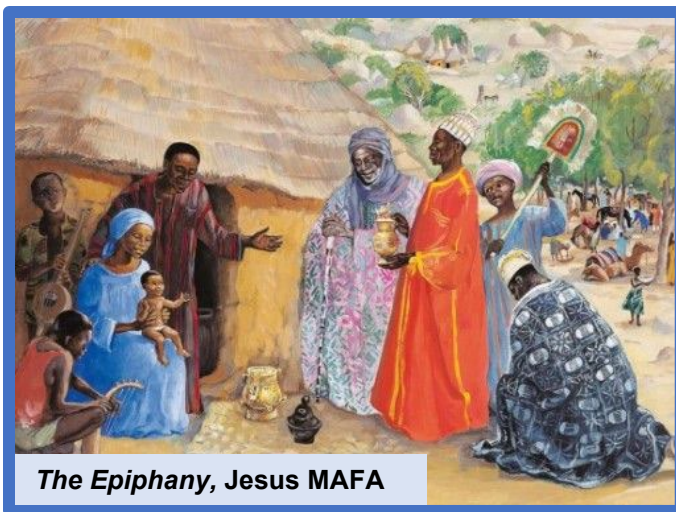


**The Nativity
Mary Clare Augustine Moore rsm** ness

to the unexpected and a critical and careful personal and communal dialogue between our life experience and our faith tradition.

Light becomes the metaphor for revelation throughout our readings. Isaiah 60 begins with the words, “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” The wise ones tell Herod, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage” (Matt 2:2).

The spiritual writer, Edwina Gately, goes to the core of what the Epiphany is all about. “It is about the recognition of the divine in our world and in each one of us. The three kings recognized the divinity in Christ and celebrated that awareness — bringing gifts. We are all called to celebrate Epiphany, to recognize the divine presence in all and to acknowledge that we are all sons and daughters of God — ‘next of kin.’”



These words take us to the next shimmering thread, that of **inclusion**. Luke had introduced the first visitors to the new baby as the poorest of the people in Judah, the shepherds, those who were closest to Earth and Earth creatures. Now Matthew introduces us to the exact opposite group — foreigners from other lands who are important enough and powerful enough to demand a meeting with the king. That strong message of inclusion has been introduced in the first reading when Isaiah speaks about two different groups of people, “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all

gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms” (Is 60:3-4). This is a most unusual text in that it is rare for the Israelites to include any one outside their own people in their relationship with their God. Here the nations are invited to learn about God from Judah and to praise Judah’s God. Then the exiles returning are named as the sons and daughters, the next generation born in exile, with both sons and daughters explicitly named.

The letter to the Ephesians echoes the presence of the Gentiles in the Gospel story in beautifully inclusive language, “The Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6).

Psalms 72 completes the circle of inclusion with all Earth, “May God have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the Earth” (Ps 72:8).

In his message for the World Day for Peace, Pope Francis reflects that need for inclusion, “To government leaders and to all those charged with political and social responsibilities, to priests and pastoral workers, and to all men and women of good will, I make this appeal: let us walk together with courage and creativity on the path of intergenerational dialogue, education, and work. May more and more men and women strive daily, with quiet humility.

We should be surprised that something as simple as **gifts** would be present in our Epiphany message! In Isaiah we read, “All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord” (Is 60:6). Sheba, a foreign land, is invited into the company of the Lord and responds bringing with them gifts. That same language is echoed in Psalm 72, “May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts” (Ps 72:10). Clearly, these passages

give Matthew what this writer needs to tell his story, “Opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt 2:11).



Journey of the Magi,
James Tissot

Gifts are a way of saying thank you for the invitation to friendship, to welcome, to hospitality. They become a way of strengthening relationships. John Philip Newell describes the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh beautifully:

The wise ones bring gifts: gold, a costly stone that speaks of the preciousness of the Child; frankincense, a blessed aromatic that signifies the sacredness of the Child; myrrh, a curative ointment that points to the healing gifts of the Child. Preciousness, sacredness, healing – this is what the magi are looking for and come to adore. . . We carry within us the precious gold of life, the sacred fragrance of God, the healing salve of love. Let us live it together.



Adoration of the Magi,
Murillo

It is not surprising that the response to the light, the inclusion and the gifts would be **rejoicing**. Isaiah says it so strongly, “Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice” (Is 60:1, 5). The wise ones felt that same emotion, “When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy” (Matt 2:10).

Remember a moment in these past few days and months when you felt that same joy, that same radiance shimmering through your very being. We had such moments as a Congregation during this past summer, especially in our gatherings with our partners in Mercy from Newfoundland and Labrador and from Peru. We experienced radiance in our global gatherings during in Mercy Global Presence process. Those of us who live at The Mount felt such joy during our gatherings in these Christmas days.

Look back over your life. What moments still fill your heart with radiance?

And our last shimmering thread is **the journey**, but now a return journey by another road. For the exiles, the return is very different from the way they went into exile, “Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms” (Is 60:4). The writer of Matthew’s Gospel tells us quite clearly, “Having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road” (Matt 2:12).

Bruce Epperly summarizes what returning by another road means, “These words capture the spirituality of Epiphany—‘going home by another road.’ In the season of Epiphany, God calls us to wake up to revelation that stretches, surprises, and transfigures. Revelations can be found everywhere and in every situation, and they always call us to take another road, to become a new creation, and welcome adventure in the midst of challenge.

Epiphany is special for all of us who are Gentiles, gentiles invited into the sacred community shaped for us by Judaism. Veronica Lawson rsm says it simply and well, “There is an invitation for us to enter into Matthew’s drama, to be the wise ones, to join with people of diverse cultures, to engage in our own search for Wisdom, to honour the birth and the life of every child and to follow the star that leads to truth and lasting peace.”

And the Lutheran theologian, Karoline Lewis takes it even further”

Our world needs more epiphanies — and not just the ones to which we point, name, or describe — but the epiphanies that we are willing to be. What if living out your baptism in the world was committed to being just that? To be the ones who tear apart the boundaries that try to keep God from whom God loves? Who tear apart the boundaries that inhibit others from experiencing God’s grace? Who tear apart the boundaries constructed to determine who is saved and who isn’t? Yes, the world needs more epiphanies — those of us ready to take on the responsibility of our baptism.

You and I, we are called to be epiphanies! You are called to be an epiphany! I am called to be an epiphany! We are called to be epiphanies! What joy, what promise, what hope that holds for our world!