

Reflections for Christmas Day – 25 December 2021 The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

For our Liturgy this Christmas Day, we find readings which remind us of the depths of God's love, poured out into the incarnation, first in the cosmos and then in the person of Jesus the Christ.



The first chapter of John's Gospel makes the precious, life-giving connection. The opening words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (Jn 1:1-2) bring us immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said" (Gen 1:1-3). In that chapter from Genesis, we

reflect on the creation of the universe from light to the sky and waters and Earth to the plants and fish and birds and animals to humankind.

That creation happens because God speaks the word – as creation unfolds, verse after verse is marked by the words "Then God said." The book of Wisdom repeats the same theme of God's word and creation being inseparable, "While gentle silence enveloped all things, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven" (Ws 18:14-16). Now the Gospel of John says that God chooses to come in yet another way, in Jesus who personifies the Word of God. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews echoes this sense of God's Word in the creation of the world through the cosmic Christ and in the person of Jesus the Christ, "In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom God also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:2-3).

That incarnation of God in the universe's coming into being is marked by light, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness" (Gen 3-4). So, too, the coming of Jesus the Christ is marked by light. John says, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn 1:3-5).

There is a lovely prayer-poem from [Roddy Hamilton](#) which speaks to the beauty and wonder of Christmas light:

This Christmas I wish for you light
to crumple up the darkness.
This Christmas I wish for you love
to pull us closer to one another.
This Christmas I wish for you peace,
the same the angels sang.
This Christmas I wish for you starlight to follow on your way home.
This Christmas I wish for you promise to keep hope alive for you.

This Christmas I wish for you God newly born and in the flesh.
This Christmas I wish for you Jesus Christ born this night, light of the world.

In response to the first incarnation, as we sing in Psalm 89, all Earth rejoices, “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the Earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises” (Ps 98:4). In our usual human-centeredness, we used to think that meant only the humans around the world. Now we know all Earth creatures rejoice in creation – in all their diverse ways of showing that joy from the trees standing so stately to flowers blossoming so beautifully to the sounds of a meowing kitten or the bark of a little puppy to the varied shapes of seashells to the dancing glow of the Northern lights.



Alstroemeria (Peruvian Lily)

When Jesus comes among us in that stable in Bethlehem, there is rejoicing. The angels sing, “There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours!’” (Lk 2:13-14). The shepherds go in haste to see the baby in the manger; then “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Lk 2:20). The heavens (the angels) and Earth (the shepherds who work in the fields with the flocks – the ones closest to Earth every single day) come together once more to rejoice together in the incarnation of the loving God.

Incarnation, God’s word, light, rejoicing – when that interweaving would seem to be complete, God continues to surprise us. In the late thirteenth century, Meister Eckhart says it so simply and profoundly, “God creates the entire universe fully and totally in the present now ... There where time never penetrates, where no image shines in us, in the innermost and deepest aspect of the soul, God creates the whole cosmos in the innermost depths of every soul now.” Another German theologian, Karl Rahner, says the same thing seven hundred years later, “When we say, ‘It is Christmas,’ we mean that God has spoken into the world his last, his deepest, his most beautiful word in the incarnate Word. . . And this word means: I love you, you, the world, and human beings.”

Now we are invited to speak God’s word of peace in our world – each one of us in whatever part of the world we live and minister. Today’s first reading completes the circle, “How beautiful upon



Inca Trail, Andes, Peru

the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news” (Is 52:7). Our Creator God and Jesus the Incarnate Word trust that we will be the messengers who will announce peace, who will bring good news, wherever we walk. What incredible trust God places in us! Not only do God and Jesus trust us to do this, but they also pour out the Spirit into our hearts and minds and spirits to be with us on our way.

Imagine all the ways in which you personally are a messenger of peace and of good news. Think about the ways, even in the past few days, in which you have brought peace or good news into someone's life. You may have done so by simply lending a listening ear or taken the time to listen to a story or given a donation in someone's name to The Gathering Place or given someone a gift that they treasure or. . .

As we say "Yes" to this invitation to be messengers of peace and good news, we are comforted by this prayer from [Pat Bergen, csj](#). Find one phrase from her prayer that you will hold close to your heart in a special way through these twelve days of Christmas:

May the Star of inclusive, poured out, communing love
direct every decision we make on our journey.
May our dreams lead us to profound reverence
as we bow before the Divine born in the stable of every heart
and in the stable of the whole universe.
May Mary guide us in birthing the Holy One in our lives
and in birthing Love in others.
May Joseph engage us in deeper questioning and listening
and give us courage to risk the next step.
May our lives become a luminous presence,
leading others to the place in our hearts and in the world
where Christ is always being born anew.

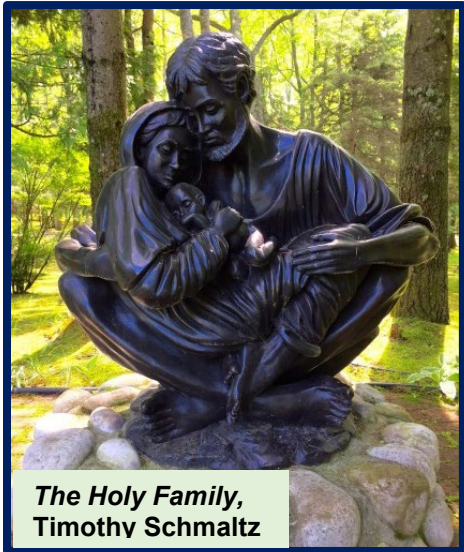
Happy Christmas, each messenger of peace and good news!



REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY ~ 26 DECEMBER 2021

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today is the feast of the Holy Family, a celebration of the life of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus and a reminder to us that there are many shapes and sizes of families. Some families have two parents, some one parent, some live with other relatives or in foster families. Some children are orphaned at an early age; some keep their parents for long years. Some live in blended families. Some live in multigenerational families. Some live in broken families.



It is no surprise that the ordinariness of the coming of the Incarnate One, Jesus the Christ, would include his mother – a teenager who became pregnant before she was married, Jesus who was born in a stable, his father Joseph who was a carpenter in Nazareth, the family of three who became refugees in Egypt, the family of three who followed closely their faith traditions, the pre-teen boy Jesus who caused his parents deep fear. The life of this family is reflected in the lives of families throughout our world today. Here in the Scriptures, this family holds the Incarnate One in its care, nurtures him, teaches him his faith and his Scriptures, and prepares him to become the adult who changes the face of the Earth.

Every family on Earth is called to be “holy.” No family is perfect. All struggle from time to time, yet they hold each other in love and in hope. Some are subject to circumstances that cause fear, anxiety, dysfunction, pain, and suffering. Some are overwhelmed by these struggles. Others grow through them.

In our Christian tradition, our first image of God is as Trinity – a community of three called by many names including Father, Son, and Spirit. In the Old Testament, God is imaged sometimes as father, sometimes as mother. Jesus is presented as “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1:3). There is no doubt that Jesus learned from Mary and Joseph his Scriptures – they were going to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover when Jesus was lost. Their fidelity to the Jewish tradition formed the person which Jesus became.

Recall the ways in which you are the reflection and imprint of your parents – in what ways are you like your mother? In what ways are you like your father? How did they lead you in the first steps in your faith? In what ways by your actions or looks, do you remind yourself of one or the other of them?

Our readings in today’s feast also remind us of the great family of humankind who live in the household of God, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! Blessed are those who live in your house, ever singing your praises” (Ps 84:1, 4). The theme of this past year’s Season of Creation was “A home for everyone? Renewing



the *oikos* of God.” By centering on the concept of *oikos* (the Greek word for home), we focused on the integral nature of the many relationships that hold the web of life together. The logo was the tent of Abraham and Sarah who welcomed the three strangers to their tent, not knowing one was the Lord (see Genesis 18). The tent is a symbol of the call to live the care of creation as an act of radical hospitality, safeguarding a place for all creatures – human and otherwise – in the common home, *oikos* of God.

Today’s liturgy celebrates in a special way two mothers, Hannah and Mary. Hannah acts in ways most unexpected for a woman of her time – she makes the decision to pray to God for a son; when she weans her son Samuel, she makes the decision to “lend him” to the Lord; she brings Samuel herself to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and determines what the sacrifice will be during the ceremony. Her prayer found in 1 Sam 2:1-10 begins with the words, “My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God” (1 Sam 2:2). Her song will be echoed by Mary in her *Magnificat*.



Samuel dedicated by Hannah

In the Gospel of Luke, we read the story of the visit of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover. Unknown to his parents, the twelve-year old Jesus remains behind listening to the teachers in the temple, asking them questions. He is lost to his parents for three days, before they find him, reprimand him, and bring him home. We are told, “Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in favour with God and human beings” (Lk 2:52). This echoes the words spoken about Samuel, “The boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people” (1 Sam 2:26).

Both stories feature a childless woman, a prayer answered in the temple, a boy dedicated to God’s service from before his birth. And both Jesus and Samuel demonstrate, even in their childhood, an uncommon aptitude for their roles of prophet, priest, and teacher: Jesus astonishes in the temple, while Samuel hears God’s call at a time when “the word of the Lord was rare in those days” (1 Samuel 3:1).



The Gospel story ends with those most profound and poignant words, “Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51-52). Both Jesus and Mary learned from this troubling moment in Jesus’ life. Mary, in the challenges and in the struggles of her life as

mother and wife, takes time for contemplation, for “treasuring these things in her heart.” Let us like Mary find the time to treasure in our hearts what happens to us in our lives every day, especially those which seem most challenging and difficult.

The letter to the Colossians reminds us, no matter what the shape or size of our family, that our families are all called to “clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:12). We are invited to “forgive each other. . . clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. . . let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . . be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col 3:13-16). The wonder is that all of us are called to live this way – even when we fail, we are invited back to this way of compassion, love, gratitude, and peace.

As our new year unfolds, let us help our chosen families be “holy.” Let us make the places that we now call home places of radical hospitality. The Irish spiritual writer, [John O'Donohue](#), describes such a home:

May this house shelter your life.
When you come in home here,
May all the weight of the world
Fall from your shoulders.

May this home be a place of discovery,
Where the possibilities that sleep
In the clay of your soul can emerge
To deepen and refine your vision
For all that is yet to come to birth.

May it be a house of courage,
Where healing and growth are loved,
Where dignity and forgiveness prevail;
A home where patience and spirit is prized,
And the sight of the destination is never lost
Though the journey be difficult and slow.

May there be great delight around this hearth.
May it be a house of welcome
For the broken and diminished.
May you have the eyes to see
That no visitor arrives without a gift
And no guest leaves without a blessing.



The Holy Family, Jesus MAFA

May the place you call home be a place of shelter for you, a place of courage and healing, a place of dignity and forgiveness, a place where patience and spirit is prized, a place of welcome for those who feel broken or diminished, a place of blessing, a holy place which is home to a holy family.

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

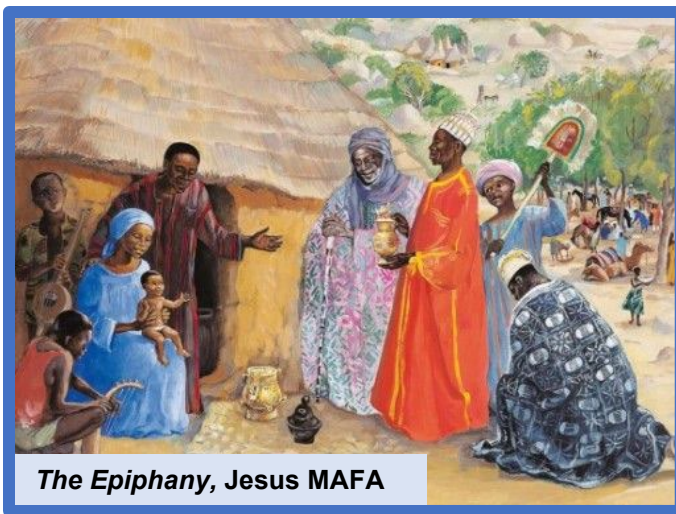


**The Nativity
Mary Clare Augustine Moore rsm** ness

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.

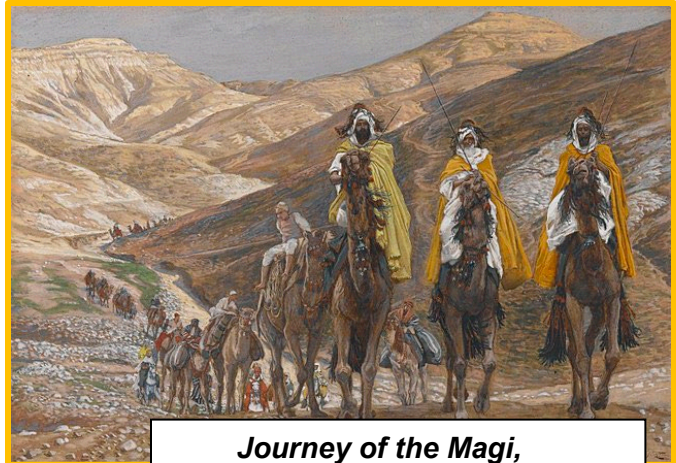
The letter to the Ephesians echoes the presence of the Gentiles in the Gospel story in beautifully inclusive language, “The Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph 3:6).

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!