

REFLECTIONS FOR CHRISTMAS ~ 25 December 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale



Our God is a God of surprises and none more startling than the surprises we find in the readings in the Liturgy of the Word for the three Masses on Christmas Day – during the night, in the early morning, and during the day (the only day in our liturgical year to have this distinction). We have become so accustomed to the Christmas stories that we just take them for granted and no longer see the wonder embedded in them. Ron Rolheiser omi reminds us, “Christmas is meant to bring us back to the crib so that our hearts can feel that freshness that wants to make us start living over again.” Let us reflect on the wonder of the readings in

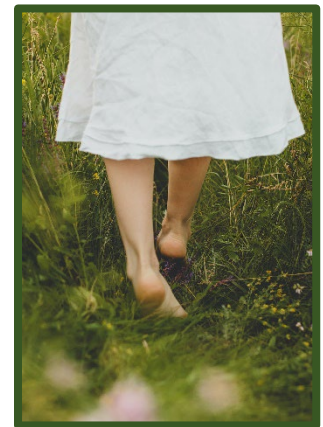
today’s Liturgies of the Word.

They would have expected God to bring them out of darkness, but not to be led by a little child!

In all three Masses, the readings come from the book of Isaiah. They were written during very challenging times for the people of Israel and are among the most uplifting passages in all Scripture. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined” (Is 9:2), and “There shall be endless peace” which will be upheld “with justice and with righteousness” (Is 9:7). The wonder comes in knowing that the light and endless peace flow from the presence of a newborn child, not a mighty warrior or powerful king, ““For a child has been born for us, a son given to us” (Is 9:6).

Of course, they delight in the ones who bring the good news, but beautiful feet?

In the reading from Isaiah in the Mass during the day, we read, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news” (Is 52:7). Think about this image – we would have expected that the words of the messenger or perhaps the face of the messenger would be described as beautiful as the messenger brings the good news but not the feet! But, on reflection, it makes perfect sense! The feet are closest to Earth, in this instance, the mountain. The feet take the messenger to the people. The feet remind us that the bearer of the good news must not only speak the good news but embody the good news through intimate presence to Earth and to people. This embodiment of the good news is so important that one of God’s names from the Rabbi commentators on the Torah is *Shekinah* – the one who dwells among us. In the Christian tradition, this is the name that the angel tells Joseph is to be given to the newborn Jesus – Emmanuel, God-with-us.



The response to the good news is rejoicing but surely Earth is not joining in the singing!

What is the good news that both Isaiah and the Psalmist are celebrating? God the Lord has broken the burden that the people have been carrying, has overthrown the oppressor, has brought



Rainbow Mountain (Cusco, Peru)
Northern Lights (Canada)

endless peace with justice and righteousness, has remembered steadfast love and faithfulness for the people of Israel.

The first response to this good news is joy – joy expressed in singing, joy expressed in both people and Earth! In Psalm 96, we hear proclaimed, “O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps 96:1). And the response is immediate, “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord who is coming” (Ps 96:11-13). Psalm 98 picks up this same joy-filled energy, “O sing to the Lord a new song. . . All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD” (Ps 98:1, 3-6).

The good news of the people of Israel finds new expression among the people of the New Testament!

There is little wonder that the later Christian communities would borrow this unexpected imagery to describe the birth of Jesus the Christ, who, in the words of the book of Hebrews, “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 1:3). We are immediately reminded that this same imagery was used about Woman Wisdom in the book of Wisdom, “For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God’s goodness” (Wis 7:26) and about God who created all things with a powerful word, “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:3). Just as God created with a word, so now Jesus the Christ “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3).

Who are now the messengers of the good news, whose beautiful feet carry the message?

The unexpected images continue. The Jewish Christian writer of Matthew’s Gospel has the good news come first to the Gentile Wise Ones from the East; the Gentile writer of the Gospel of Luke has the good news come first to a group of Jewish shepherds, the lowest class in the Jewish society! In Luke’s nativity narrative, we delight in seeing the angels bring the good news to the shepherd, but we barely notice the words about the shepherds after they saw a little baby boy in a manger, “When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them” (Lk 2:17-18). The German liberation theologian, Dorothee Soelle, says of the shepherds:



The frightened shepherds become God's messengers. They organize, make haste, find others, and speak with them. Do we not all want to become shepherds and catch sight of the angel? I think so. Without the perspective of the poor, we see nothing, not even an angel. When we approach the poor, our values and goals change. The child appears in many other children. Mary also seeks sanctuary among us. Because the angels sing, the shepherds rise, leave their fears behind, and set out for Bethlehem, wherever it is situated these days.

The first Christians would have expected the Messiah to bring them out of darkness, but not that the Messiah would come as a little child, homeless and a refugee!



The story in Luke continues, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). There is a lovely hymn with this title, "Mary was the first one to carry the gospel." Mary carries the good news of the incarnate God in her womb and in her arms. And she carries the good news in the words which she treasures and ponders in her heart.

Pope Francis reminds us about the startling coming of God in the person of the baby Jesus:

We contemplate the child. In his littleness, God is completely present. Let us acknowledge this: "Baby Jesus, you are God, the God who becomes a child". Let us be amazed by this scandalous truth. The One who embraces the universe needs to be held in another's arms. The One who created the sun needs to be warmed. Tenderness incarnate needs to be cuddled. Infinite love has a miniscule

heart that beats softly. The eternal Word is an "infant", a speechless child. The Bread of life needs to be nourished. The Creator of the world has no home. Today, all is turned upside down: God comes into the world in littleness. God's grandeur appears in littleness.

Ron Rolheiser omi reiterates the same theme, "Christmas is meant not just to renew our faith and hope, but also to renew our innocence. God is born as helpless, vulnerable, thoroughly underwhelming baby who looks out at us quietly even as we look back at him and he judges us in that way that vulnerability judges false strength, forever, transparency judges lies, generosity judges selfishness, innocence judges over-sophistication, and a baby, gently and helplessly and disarmingly, calls forth what's best in us."

Christmas is a time to rejoice in the good news that God has become incarnate – once again!

In the words of Richard Rohr ofm, "The first Incarnation was the moment described in Genesis 1, when God joined in unity with the physical universe and became the light inside of everything. The Incarnation is not only 'God becoming Jesus.' It is a much broader event, which is why John first describes God's presence in the general word 'flesh' (Jn 1:14). John is speaking of the ubiquitous Christ we continue to encounter in other human beings, a mountain, a blade of grass, or a starling."

John's Gospel does not have an infancy narrative, but, as we hear in today's Gospel reading, it does begin with the origins of the person of Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . 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 1:1, 3-5). Once again, the light shines in the darkness! Once again, the people and Earth rejoice!

Christmas is a time to rejoice in the good news that God has become incarnate – in each one of us – human and other-than-human!

On this Christmas day, we are reminded that, just as our creating and sustaining God makes peace through justice and right relationships, so, too, we are expected to be bearers of the good news, makers of peace, bringers of justice, living embodiment of right relationships. This is a blessing for all of us (adapted from the words of the Scottish minister Roddy Hamilton), an invitation to sing the incarnation into birth:

May we sing incarnation into birth
may the very longing of this season
be enough for your promise to take on flesh
for bread to be shared
for planet to be loved
for lost to be found
for loneliness to be befriended
for seeker to be sought
for deserts to bloom
for flavelas to become palaces
for chaos to be given rhythm
for wars to end
May we sing incarnation into birth.

The Jesuit Philip Chircop has these wise words for us as we sing incarnation into birth: "In the coming days, simmering and basking in Christmas joy, try to intentionally walk softly ... talk quietly ... kneel reverently ... rise eagerly ... Spend some time reflecting on the radical beauty of these simple words: Walk ... Talk ... Kneel ... Rise ... Softly ... Quietly ... Reverently ... Eagerly."

Happy Christmas!

REFLECTIONS FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD 01 January 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Since 1969, January 1, the Octave Day of the Nativity, has been celebrated as the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, the commemoration of the conferral of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and the World Day of Peace. In his Apostolic Letter *Marialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI explained: "This celebration, placed on January 1 ...is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the 'holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life.' It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace."

In 431, at the Council of Ephesus, Mary was given the title *Theotokos* (birth-giver of God), translated in English as the Mother of God (in Greek, Μήτηρ τοῦ Θεοῦ). You will see it written on icons as *MP ΘY* (the first and last letters of the Greek words in the title). Mary is *Theotokos* because her son Jesus is both God and man, human and divine. The title for her is used in the Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions.

We have a beautiful weaving of themes through this day, all themes of light, hope, new beginnings, and amazing possibilities: Mary as Mother of God, the naming of Jesus and his acceptance into his Jewish tradition, our adoption as children of God, the recognition of the extraordinary gift of peace to people and to Earth, and the birth of a new year.

Mary, Mother of God, Theotokos: the angel Gabriel brings invitation to Mary, asking her to accept God's call, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:30-35). Mary consents to the invitation, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:28). When Mary visits her cousin, Elizabeth becomes the first one to recognize that Mary is to be the Mother of God. She proclaims prophetically, "Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42-43).

Pope Paul VI says so beautifully that, through Mary, "we were found worthy to receive the Author of life." In his homily on this day in 2022, Pope Francis echoes these same words, "The New Year begins under the sign of the Holy Mother of God, under the sign of the Mother. A mother's gaze is the path to rebirth and growth."

We know that Mary did not take lightly what she has accepted to do. We are told, after the shepherds have visited the baby in the manger, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). When Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple for the purification, we are told after Simeon speaks, "The child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him" (Lk 2:33). And, again, after the twelve-year old Jesus remains behind in the temple where they had come to celebrate the festival of Passover and there is a conversation between Jesus and Mary and Joseph, we are told, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51). Mary, the mother of Jesus and the mother of God, is a woman of deep contemplation.

The Naming of Jesus and his acceptance into his Jewish tradition: like all of us, Jesus is given a name and, like many of us, at the same time he is welcomed formally into his faith tradition.

In Luke's Gospel, we are told twice about this name. the Angel Gabriel says to Mary, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Lk 1:31). And the narrator tells us in Lk 2:21, "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." The very first words in the Gospel of Matthew tell us the name, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). In that same Gospel, the angel tells Joseph, "She (Mary) will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). At the end of the first chapter, we are told, "he (Joseph) named him Jesus" (Matt 1:25). Neither Mark nor John tell us when Jesus receives his name. We know that the name comes through Latin from Greek from the Hebrew and Aramaic *Yeshua* or *Y'shua*, meaning "YHWH saves."

Jesus' acceptance into the Jewish faith tradition is the same as every Jewish male's, through circumcision, as we noted in the words from Luke's Gospel. Neither of the other three Gospels tell us that Jesus is circumcised. Luke whom we believe to be a Gentile is the only one who comments on this rite of initiation into the Jewish religion.

Our adoption as Children of God: In the letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:4-6). Mary, the Mother of God, is also our Mother. We dare to call God "Abba! Father!" God calls us by name, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Is 43:1). In the prayer at the end of our reflection, we will say the words about Jesus in intimate relationship with us, "Name above all names: you call us your siblings, claiming us to share in your work; exalted above all creation, you humbled yourself for our sake; able to do all things, you choose to work through us."

The Extraordinary Gift of Peace to People and to Earth: Pope Paul VI established this day as the World Day of Peace, imagining peace threaded through the nativity in Luke and Matthew – the glad tidings of the angels to the shepherds (Lk 2:14), the adoration of the Prince of Peace by the Wise Ones and by the shepherds, Mary as the Queen of Peace, one who treasured the words and pondered them in her heart. We know only too well the absence of peace in our world today – the prevailing incidence of COVID, the unjust war against the Ukraine, the political instability and turmoil in Peru, the overtaxing of our health systems in Canada, increasing world poverty linked with the pandemic, increasing costs of food and home heating, increasing impact of drug use, the intergenerational trauma of poverty and violence, the racism prevalent in Canada and globally against Indigenous peoples and immigrants, domestic abuse against spouses, elders, and children.

In his message this year for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis speaks to both the COVID pandemic and the war in the Ukraine as he answers the question, "What is being asked of us?":

First of all, to let our hearts be changed by our experience of the crisis, to let God, at this time in history, transform our customary criteria for viewing the world around us. We can no longer think exclusively of carving out space for our personal or national interests; instead, we must think in terms of the common good, recognizing that we belong to a greater community, and opening our minds and hearts . . . in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars that continue to spawn poverty and death. We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle

the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labour for all, supporting those who lack even a minimum wage and find themselves in great difficulty. The scandal of entire peoples starving remains an open wound. We also need to develop suitable policies for welcoming and integrating migrants and those whom our societies discard.

The Birth of a New Year: when we see the interweaving of all the threads binding this day together, we find hope. This Son, this Jesus, “born of a woman,” teaches us the ways of peace. His mother Mary treasures the words and ponders them in her heart. The Spirit of peace, gentleness, and hope is poured out abundantly on all – human and other-than-human. The New Year is a symbolic moment when we treasure the words as Mary did and ponder them in our hearts, when we begin anew, when the door opens to greater possibility, when we renew our commitment to “Mercy: Imaging the Face of God in All Creation.”

Let us bring all these themes together in two reflections – the first from Thom Shuman (*Majestic God, Names above all Names, Spirit of Grace*) and the second from Roddy Hamilton (*On this edge of years*):

Majestic God,

we cannot begin to imagine you, yet you have made us in your image;
we wonder why you notice us, when we are surrounded by creation's glory;
we have been made stewards of life, and you choose to share your own with us.

Name above all names:

you call us your siblings, claiming us to share in your work;
exalted above all creation, you humbled yourself for our sake;
able to do all things, you choose to work through us.

Spirit of Grace:

when we look for majesty, you bring us to a manger;
when we yearn for glory, you hand us a mop;
when we want to exalt ourselves, you point us to the Cross.

On this edge of years

the crossroads between past and future

we come as who we have been

and offer you who we might yet be

Take this offering of ourselves, a new promise to be your people here
holding a renewed vision of your reign here

Take this, take us

that we might be light and follow you anew
as we journey across borders of time
and find new years, new places to be your renewed people. Amen.

On this edge of years from 2022 to 2023, let us, invited like Mary to be God-bearers in our world and invited to be siblings with Jesus crying out “Abba! Father!”, come to our God as who we have been and offer you who we might yet be. Let us renew our promise to be co-creators in re-shaping our world of justice, peace, hope, and joy. Let us find the courage to be God’s renewed people for a renewed Earth. “May God bless you and keep you; may God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may God’s countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26).

In the diversity of the images of Mary as Mother of God below, let us ponder more deeply the wonder and the beauty of inclusion in ways that we have never before imagined.



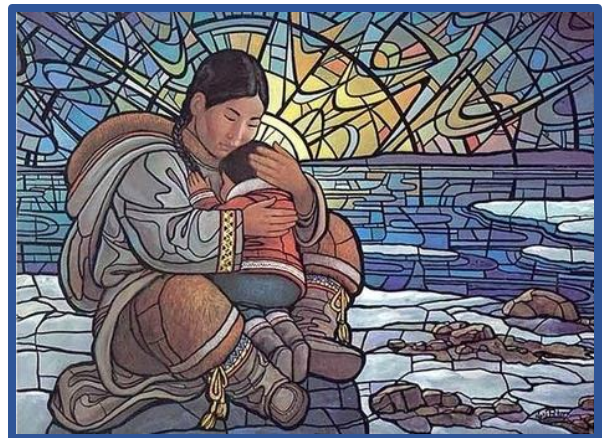
Maximino Cerezo Barredo cmf (Peru)



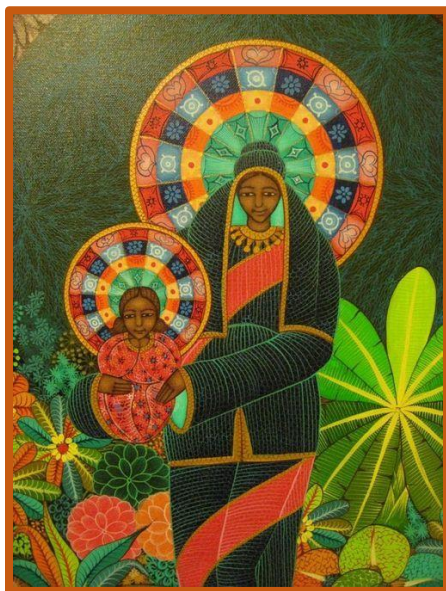
Tsolak Shahinyan (The Ukraine)



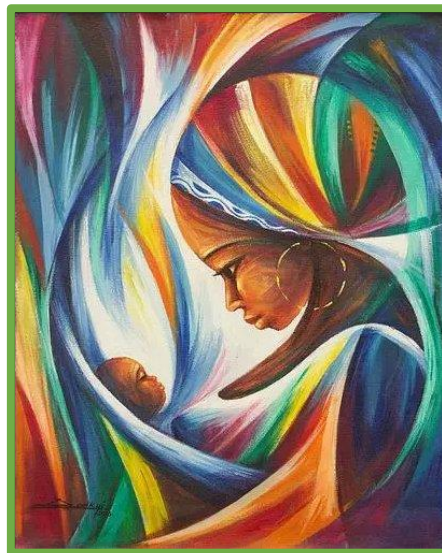
Jojo Sabalvaro-Tan (Philippines)



Nori Peter (Inuit,Canada)



Ismael Saincilus (Haiti)



Artist Unknown (Africa)



Li Ma (China)

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY ~ 08 January 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“Arise, shine; for your light has come” (Is 60:1) – with these words, the Liturgy of the Word for the Feast of the Epiphany begins, a feast, which together with the celebration of the baptism of Jesus, brings the days of Christmas to an end. Threaded through our Liturgy of the Word today are themes of light, seeing, power, gifts, and journey.

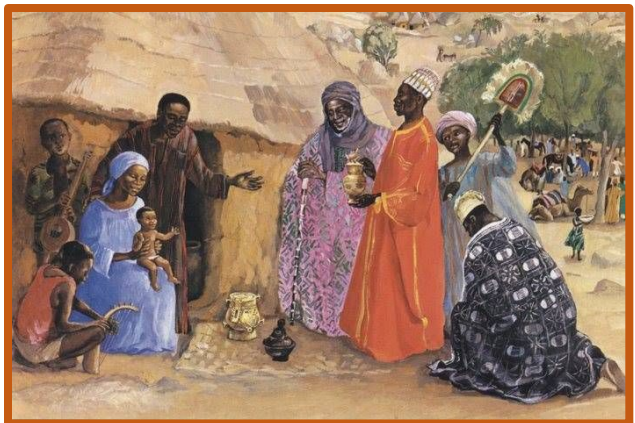


Light – the reading from Isaiah 60 speaks to a new beginning, “Arise, shine,” as the people return to the Promised Land from the exile in Babylon, a time of rebirth and renewed hope. That new beginning is inclusive; it is for young and old and for women and men, “Your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms” (Is 60:4), and it is for all peoples and nations not just the people of Judah, “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. . .the young camels of Midian and

Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come” (Is 60:3, 6).

The nativity narrative in Matthew’s Gospel consciously uses the same imagery of the nations’ coming to the light (the Wise Ones following the star), the bringing of gifts of gold and frankincense, and the inclusion of peoples who are not Jews (“from the East”). Matthew’s story gives that same sense of something new happening, a hope being reborn, of newness flowing from tradition but going well beyond it.

Seeing – the word “epiphany” does not occur in any of our readings but has been used of this feast in various ways since the 4th century. The word comes from the Greek word ἐπιφάνεια (*epipháneia*), meaning an appearance or manifestation or revelation, here meaning the revelation of God in the person of Jesus the Christ, in creation, in day-to-day experience, in sacred stories. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians says, “the mystery was made known to me by revelation” (Eph 3:3). And Veronica Lawson reminds us, “The ancient feast of the Epiphany reminds us that the whole created universe is in God and that God is in us. It celebrates the presence of God who is revealed to us in wondrous ways. . . A deep awareness of our place in the Earth community and kinship with the more-than-human teaches us respect for all being and respect for the power of God’s Spirit to lead us beyond ourselves towards a more profound encounter with the divine.” The reading from Isaiah give and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice . . .



The Magi Visit the Baby Jesus, Jesus MAFA

Power – while the readings speak about power among peoples, it gives an image of power far different from our usual expectations. In the reading from Isaiah, the coming of leaders of nations

is balanced by the “daughters being carried in the nurses’ arms.” The king’s role is clearly described in Psalm 72. The king is powerful, with “dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Ps 72:8), and the kings of Tarshish and of the isles, of Sheba and Seba, bring him tribute and gifts. But his role is to “judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice” so that “In his days may righteousness flourish and and peace abound” (Ps 72:2). His job description is succinctly stated, “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy” (Ps 72:12-13).

In the Gospel narrative, this sense of power is profoundly addressed as the king who holds power certainly does not live the image described in Isaiah and Psalm 72. The Wise Ones have no hesitancy in seeing the powerful one as a little baby, “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage” (Matt 2:11). The Jesuit John Foley says simply, “The child’s weakness shows what God has in mind as an answer to evil: *tender, unfearing openness to love*.” His words are echoed by Veronica Lawson as she finds in this feast “an invitation to be wary of those who find their positions threatened by a different sort of power, power based on vulnerability and openness to new life.”



Gifts – the three gifts named in Matthew’s narrative have given us the sense that there were three Wise Ones. In fact, we do not know how many Wise Ones they are, whether they are all men, what races they actually are, or whether they rode on camels!. We know from the passage in Isaiah that gold and frankincense were brought in tribute to mark the new time after the return from exile. Many explanations have been given why these three gifts are the ones chosen. Let us reflect on three possible explanations.

Jan Richardson goes back to the Old Testament to find an explanation. Isaiah and the Psalms refer to kings who bring gold to honor a great ruler. For the wise men, the gift of gold was a way of acknowledging Jesus as a king. In Exodus 30, God tells Moses to make an incense that includes frankincense, for use in the tent of meeting, where God meets with the priests; God tells Moses, “It shall be for you most holy.” The wise men’s gift of frankincense symbolizes that God has come in the person of Christ, that Christ himself has become the place of meeting between divinity and humanity. Myrrh was associated with funerals and was used in the process of preparing a body for burial. The Wise Ones intended it not as a morbid gift but rather as a reminder to Jesus that, even for him, earthly life is brief, and we are called to use it well. Richardson encourages us to reflect on and learn from these gifts:

The gift of gold, the gift that recognized Jesus was as a king, invites us to consider the question: **Who were you born to be?**

The gift of frankincense, the gift that recognized Jesus as the one who is a meeting place of humanity and divinity, invites us to ponder the question: **How do you want to encounter God?**

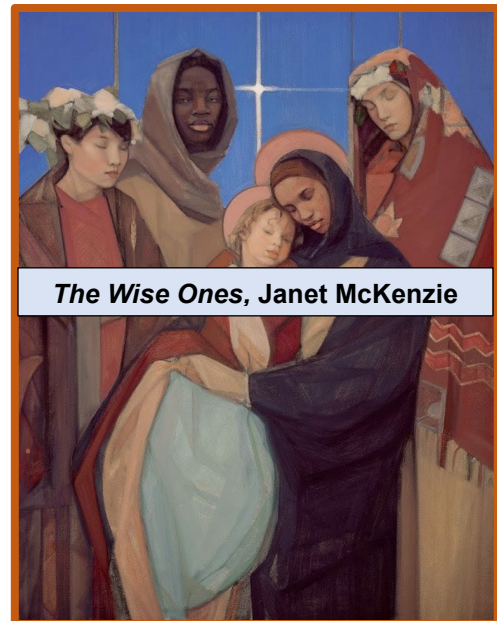
The gift of myrrh, the gift that recognized that even for Jesus, earthly life is brief, a twinkling of an eye, invites us to reflect on the question, **What is your relationship with time?**

With respect to the third gift, Richardson quotes Annie Dillard who writes, “How we spend our days is, after all, how we spend our lives. . .Live every day as if it were your last and then someday you’ll be right.”

John Philip Newell sees another meaning in the gifts – for Jesus and for us: “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.”

Through the medium of art, Janet McKenzie gives us another insight into the meaning of the Wise Ones and their three gifts: “Women around the world find an image of the Epiphany that includes and validates their encounters with the One Who Saves, celebrated here in the powerful, protective and tender manifestation of a mother and her child, embraced and nurtured by a loving community. Here is global inclusiveness and a vision of mutuality and interdependence – the giving and receiving of the **three gifts essential to life itself: presence, love and daily bread.** Epiphany proclaims again and anew: Christ for all people. God’s favor extends to all!”

Journey – in the reading from Isaiah, the people are journeying back to the Promised Land, having spent forty years in exile in Babylon. Their journey has taken them from a place of loss and hopelessness to a place of hope and radiance and peace. In Matthew’s story, the Wise Ones journey from the East, following a star, trusting that they would find new meaning and new hope. Having found that new meaning and new hope in a newborn baby, they journey back but by a new route. Jan Richardson describes that journey – coming and returning – beautifully:



There is no reversing this road.
The path that bore you here goes in one direction only,
every step drawing you down a way by which you will not return.
You thought arrival was everything,
that your entire journey ended with kneeling in the place
you had spent all to find.
When you laid down your gift, release came with such ease,
your treasure tumbling from your hands in awe and benediction.

Now the knowledge of your leaving
comes like a stone laid over your heart,
the familiar path closed and
not even the solace of a star to guide your way.
You will set out in fear. You will set out in dream.
But you will set out by that other road
that lies in shadow and in dark.

We cannot show you the route that will take you home;
that way is yours and will be found in the walking.
But we tell you, you will wonder
at how the light you thought you had left behind goes with you,
spilling from your empty hands,
shimmering beneath your homeward feet,
illuminating the road with every step you take.

Ron Rolheiser omi gives us an added insight into the return journey of the Wise Ones, "Their slipping away into anonymity is a crucial part of their gift. The idea is that they now disappear because they can now disappear. They have placed their gifts at the feet of the young king and can now leave everything safely in his hands. His star has eclipsed theirs. Far from fighting for their former place, they now happily cede it to him. Like old Simeon, they can happily exit the stage singing: now, Lord, you can dismiss your servants! To bless another person is to give away some of one's own life so that the other might be more resourced for his or her journey."

We conclude with a prayer-poem by the Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, again reflecting what this journeying means for us:

The Nativity, Sister Mary Clare Augustine Moore

On Epiphany day, we are still the people walking.
We are still people in the dark,
and the darkness looms large around us,
beset as we are by fear, anxiety, brutality, violence, loss –
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.
We are – we could be – people of your light.
So we pray for the light of your glorious presence
as we wait for your appearing
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace
as we exhaust our coping capacity
we pray for your gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and
trust in your good rule.
That we may have energy, courage, and freedom
to enact
your rule through the demands of this day.
We submit our day to you and to your rule, with
deep joy and high hope.

How rich is the wisdom embedded in today's
feast of the Epiphany! May this wisdom become
for us the star to guide us in this new journey of 2023, a journey marked by the promise of
Psalm 72, "you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice"!

