

Feast of Epiphany
Jan. 3 & 4, 2015

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After Epiphany, We Can't Go Back

You may have taken down your tree already and packed away your manger, even before the three Kings made it on the scene. But this feast marks the 12th day of Christmas. This Feast of the Three Kings always captured my imagination. As a child I got to move the kings closer to the manger as the calendar progressed toward this day. As a Franciscan Sister, I always enjoyed the custom we have. In the context of a prayer service each sister is given a saint to watch over her for the year, such as St. Joseph or St. Marianne Cope, a quote from scripture such as “forgive seventy times seven times” and a practice to attend to, like “reach out to a stranger whenever possible.” We will do that again this evening as we gather with other sisters.

The proper title of this feast is the Feast of the Epiphany, meaning the revelation of God. This feast awakens in us all kinds of messages that can carry us through the year. The Magi were not really Kings, but astrologers and they were not Jewish but were Gentiles, considered pagans at that time. So this baby has come to reveal that God has come to steal the hearts of all humanity, all of us, not just the chosen Jewish people. They followed a star because it was believed that a great and mighty ruler would be born under an unusual sign in the sky. We are given signs every day that Emmanuel is with us in our hearts and in the hearts of everyone we meet. God reveals God's self in the elements of nature which tell of God's extravagant goodness. The star brought the Magi to Bethlehem, which means “House of Bread.” We are now in the House of Bread, where the Eucharistic Presence of Christ is revealed.

These Magi bring three gifts: the gold to honor a king, the frankincense to honor a deity and myrrh to anoint a leader. Some interpret these gifts as given to one who is full of gold. Gold represents virtue. The offering of Frankincense is the offering of prayer. Myrrh signifies life marked by

suffering. We who follow Jesus are called to be people of virtue, of prayer, and people who embrace the cross.

This Feast is still filled with meaning for us because God continues to reveal God's self to us today. We are still being led by stars. What stars? The Gospel; the model lives of others; the grace God gives us in the sacraments; leaders who en flesh the Gospel; and personal inspiration. God continues to reveal God's self. Each of us is called to make the same Magi journey, seeking God in our own lives, a journey inward as well as outward, finding the light of Christ within us and all around us. This journey requires perseverance, courage, faith and generosity. It takes daring to sit in contemplation, especially when sitting in prayer is so counter to everything our culture distracts us with. It calls us to keep looking for Christ and looking back on each day to see where Christ was revealed to us. This journey calls us to hang on even when the star seems to disappear, through tough days, losses, physical challenges, rejections, injustices, confusion and disappointments. This journey to Christ requires generosity and graciousness, symbolically bowing before others, as we go out of ourselves to offer the gift of our energies; our talents; our food, clothing and money; our creative ideas; our labor; and most importantly, our presence.

After their eyes were opened to the revelation of this newborn King, who would call all peoples to God, the Magi were warned in a dream that they were not to go back to Herod, so they left for their own country by another route.

We, too, cannot encounter Christ and ever again return home by the same road. A true experience of Christ spoils us forever. We can never again remain self-absorbed or indifferent to the plight of oppressed people or folks who are in need of anything that would keep them from fully living, whether they are local or across the world. Once we awaken to the fact that they are our brothers and sisters, they too are the face of Christ, we cannot just turn away.

In Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis urges us to take the first step on the journey. “An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, has loved us first, and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy. Let us try a little hard to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: “you will be blessed if you do this.” An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.

Finally, our Pope says, “With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, God makes it possible for us to lift up our heads to start anew.”

It is a new year. Let us start anew. Let us begin in earnest on that journey of seeking Christ in our lives and in one another.