



The Epiphany of Our Lord
January 5, 2020
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+O God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Tomorrow is the official celebration of The Epiphany of Our Lord, and also the twelfth day of the Christmas Season. The “feast celebrates the manifestation of God to the world in the form of human flesh through Jesus...” (<https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-epiphany-700440>)

For many people, January 6 is a more important and meaningful celebration than Christmas is for us. The practice of giving gifts seems to be tied to the Scripture readings focused on the giving of gifts by the wise men, gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Matthew’s Gospel passage we just heard echoes the message of the Prophet Isaiah but with the added gift of myrrh, a precious commodity used for anointing the dead. It was the Jewish custom to anoint the body prior to burial with myrrh and other aloes.

(http://neverendingword.com/Never_Ending_Word/The_Holy_Anointing_Oils/Entries/2010/10/18_Myrrh_in_the_Holy_Anointing_Oil.html)

Death isn’t something we would typically connect to the beautiful image of the wise men before the manger or in today’s Gospel, a house of some kind. Death isn’t something we would connect to the beautiful image of the shepherds leaving their flocks by night to find the One heralded by the angels. Death isn’t something that we would necessarily want to think about on this the first Sunday of a new year we celebrate as the Epiphany of Our Lord.

T. S. Eliot wrote a provocative poem entitled, *The Journey of the Magi*. It is a poem of three stanzas that captures a reflective narrative of one of the wise men having encountered Jesus. The narrator says:

“All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

I should be glad of another death.” (<https://buildfaith.org/the-journey-of-the-magi/>)

So, why consider this poem in consideration of the visit of the Magi from the East, whoever they were or wherever they were from? Like the shepherds before them, the wise men returned from their trek changed for their encounter with the light of God brightly shining in and through the baby found beneath the star.

Isaiah tells us, “Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” Psalm 72 tells us, “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.” Matthew tells us, “Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh”, and then, “they left for their own country by another road”.

Imagine, if you will, what that encounter may have meant to the wise men and the presumed retinue of those traveling with them. If indeed they were wise, I would assume they were people of reflection, people gifted with discernment and truth. Perhaps, what was revealed in the One they found was more than an adorable little new born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

Perhaps, the light of the star revealed to the wise men and to us not only the Incarnation of God's love poured into the world in Jesus but also his life as well as his death. Jesus came into the world not only to bring life through his birth but life through the offering of his self, his own body, in death. That death would open the door to his resurrection from the dead and our resurrection unto eternal life.

For me and perhaps for you, a new year, a new decade in the 21st Century, could give us an opportunity for a change of course, a need to find another road, a new way of living. One of the beloved carols of Christmas is a setting of a Christina Rossetti poem, which concludes,

“What shall I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;

If I were a wise man, I would do my part;

Yet, what can I give Him?

Give Him my heart.” (https://hymnary.org/text/what_can_i_give_him_poor_as_i_am)

Today, as we stand before the manger along with the wise men from wherever they came, we unite with them in offering our gifts to the new born child lying in the manger. Perhaps like the shepherds and the kings, we are called to offer the most precious gift we have, our heart.

In this New Year, can you and I commit to offering ourselves to God in Jesus with a commitment to offering our heart? And, what would that look and feel like as we go forward in the New Year and into the Season of Epiphany?

Offering our heart to God in 2020 just might help us to commit ourselves to more prayer and to greater intentionality to be more patient, to be more tolerant, to let go of past grudges or to reorient anger toward more positive energy in life. The image of the heart beating one with Jesus is a powerful one. I appreciate that image, in part, because I recognize the need for change in my own life and perhaps you do as well.

When two hearts beat as one, wonderful thing can happen. When two hearts beat as one, two individuals commit themselves to one another. In marriage, that's a pretty easy concept to grasp.

In the journey of the Christian life, we unite with Jesus and long for our heart to beat as one with his heart. When that happens, we are given grace to walk more clearly and more nearly alongside Jesus.

Perhaps, the most important and life-changing New Year's resolution might just be embracing the grace of being one with Jesus, your heart and my heart beating as one with the heart of God in Jesus. Can we commit to that and allow God's grace to overtake us in new and life-changing ways, so that we *become* more like Jesus each and every day? Amen.