

## The Epiphany of the Lord

January 8, 2012

It's a wonderful story Matthew gives us: astrologers moving across a night landscape, following a star, until they come to the place where the child lay. It is one of the two great Christmas stories – the other being Luke's account of Jesus' birth, with its shepherds and angels. We hear this story of the Magi every year on the feast of the Epiphany, a Greek word that means "a manifestation, a showing, revelation." In this story we see God revealing his Son to Magi, some call them astrologers, those exotic figures who represent the pagan nations for whom Christ came, to make Jew and Gentile into one people. But it is more than a creative story that carries a theological message. It reminds us of an ongoing reality: Our God is a God of Epiphany.

Have you had any epiphanies lately? Something catches your eye. You follow it, and it leads you on to something wonderful. An old photo – a person across the room – a star in the sky: with such things, at times quite mundane, epiphanies begin. Your journey may be several feet or several years. At the end is wonder – joy – a precious gift. But it begins with seeing something, and it results in some sort of movement on our part, until at last we arrive at the point we were destined for from the start.

Stars come in different shapes and at different times of the day. Sometimes they simply shine from afar – drawing us closer, or pointing us in a direction. Sometimes they are quite close at hand. I think of the beauty that so often surrounds me when I bother to look about. Sometimes it is found in a garden or a park, in a sunrise or the night sky, sometimes in a visit to one of the museums or galleries downtown: Beauty that beckons. Look at the star which is our Mission Statement. It draws us closer together. Look at our Goals – they point us in a direction. It will be these words that move us along.

I think it is interesting that the star by itself doesn't do all the work. When the Magi get to Jerusalem, they need the help of the chief priests and the scribes, and... help is given! And the chief priests and the scribes turn to the words of Scripture, words that continue to guide us to Christ. As do other words. The words of a good spiritual writer. Words on public radio early in the morning. Poetry that leaves us laughing, pondering, forever elusive, forever beckoning. We need the help of words to bring us to the moment of epiphany.

And, of course, most often, it is the people that God puts in our lives. When the Magi arrived, Mary and Joseph were there to pick up the child and place him in their arms. We all have those people who help to put God into our arms. Sometimes they are people that we only know from afar. But sometimes they are just at our elbow, in the next room, around the next corner: the good friends who are there when you need them, or the stranger who passes through your life for only a short time. Sometimes they have been with us forever, or stay with us forever through their words or the memories that continue to hold them for us, like what happens when a grandparent or parent or a teacher lives on in our memories. Through their words or deeds or sometimes simply their presence, they have brought and continue to bring God to us.

One of the key words of Christmas is *Behold*. "Behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy," says the angel to the shepherds in Luke's Gospel. And today Matthew tells us, "Behold, Magi came from the east...." And then again a little later, after the meeting with Herod, "And behold, the star that they had seen...." Often we do not behold what is before us and we miss the presence of the child. Meister Eckhart once said, "The birth of Christ is always happening." I think the same can be said of the Epiphany. It too is always happening – God is at work, manifesting God's self through Christ and through those who belong to Christ – and that, of course, is all people and all creation.

So this day, let us behold: Behold the Body of Christ – in the bread of Eucharist. Behold the Body of Christ – in the community gathered here. Then, go forth and behold – Christ at work in our world.

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