



Church At Home

Prayer of the Day

O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "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." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Homily

I greet you in the name of Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem. Amen.

Moving slowly, they emerge from the darkness of human imagination, first as the rippling of shadows, then forming into majestic beings as the bright star leads them into the light of the Child. Everything about them is quiet. They do not speak. Their beautiful cloaks muffle human sounds. The hooves silently trudge through the desert sand. They travel perched high on lumbering camels. They give, they dream, they leave.

Matthew, the rabbinic writer, tells us “wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.” The news of great joy for all the people had now reached beyond the shepherd’s fields in and around the region of Bethlehem; the news was heard in the East. Some scholars would suggest this was the area of Persia. God reached beyond shepherds at the bottom of the barrel to Wise Ones at the top.

Today we bring the Wise Men, the Magi, kings who responded to the news of the birth of Jesus, "to the house where they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage."

Tradition tells us the Magi were kings who belonged to the priestly cast of Zoroastrianism, which paid particular attention to the stars. This priestly cast gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science.

The Magi from the East were scientists and practiced other religions, and God used their faith and knowledge to bring them to the Christ. More ironic, God used these scientists who practiced other religions to let King Herod and the chief priests and scribes of the people in on the news that their Messiah had been born.

Now the trouble begins. Herod is not pleased; he feels threatened. He is frightened. This is no big shocker. There is spiritual conflict between Herod, the pretender-king and Jesus, the real King of the Jews. Herod is the exact opposite of God—a murderous, self-centered pagan who devalues life. Devoid of talent, Herod uses dark arts to keep his throne: terror; secrets; murder of children. Like a roach scurrying for a dark place when the light is turned on, Herod frantically plots to destroy the tender but mighty One who threatens his throne.

He begins by inviting the Magi to a secret meeting. One thing I have learned is never to attend: a secret meeting. Nothing good comes out of a secret meeting.

"Go and search for the child," Herod tells the Magi. "I want to worship him, too." Herod is a liar. He intends no worship. He intends to pay no homage. He has no gifts to offer. He intends only to exploit the Magi, to use them as pawns in the hidden agenda he secretly and darkly wishes to advance. "When you find him," he says to them, "get back to me so that I can worship him too."

And so the Magi leave Herod, and they follow the star until it stops over the place where the child was. And Matthew tells us, in a verse that almost leaps off the page, that "when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy."

I have to believe that when the Magi experienced that joy, they were struck by contrast. They were struck by how different that joy felt from the feelings they had experienced in that secret meeting with Herod. One felt so right. The other felt so wrong. The joy they felt when the star stopped was the inner confirmation that they had arrived at the place. Anytime we experience that kind of deep joy that is God's gift, then we know that we are where we are meant to be.

Have you ever had such a moment? I'm sure you have. Stop and call it to mind. A moment when things seem to really line up for you? A moment when you felt so at home in your own skin, so at one with yourself and everything, that you knew the place at which you had arrived is the place where you belong. A moment when you can say, "This is me. This is why I'm alive. This is who I am. This is where I am meant to be." A moment when the star you've been following stops and you find yourself overwhelmed with the joy that comes from being you. It might have been your first day as a teacher. It might have been when together as a family you

decide to be a stay at home Mom. It might have been the day you retired and was able to do exactly what you always wanted to do. That's the moment God wishes for all of us.

The Magi had arrived at the place where the divine and the human meet. They had arrived at the place where heaven and earth come together. "Yes, this is it." The joy they experienced confirmed that.

But basking in the joy that confirmed their arrival at the right place, they also remembered their secret meeting with Herod. They knew that they had to decide what they would do with what he had asked. I don't think the dream caught them off guard. Remember they were wise men. The dream only confirmed their suspicions.

The Magi refused to go in the direction of their fears. Through their own God-given, inner voices, they chose life and growth and joy. They trusted their own inner experience of joy. They went in the direction of the Divine, even though Herod wanted them to go in another direction. They did that because that inner joy, the inner joy they experienced, is worth trusting and worth following and worth building a life around. That inner joy we experience is the still, small voice of God, calling us to live and follow the star and not in what the world expects.

My friends in Christ. Herod has a thousand faces. He is alive today in anyone or anything that leads us away from being overwhelmed with the joy that God wants us to have. I pray that we as individuals and as a community of faith are wise to the fear of the Herods and trust in our inner experience of joy, which is the gift of God and move us courageously, confidently to follow the star.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

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STTLC communique

In Our Prayers Today.....Nancy Briscoe, Mike Harrington, Lila Martinat, Irlavere Tubbe, Bobby Keuhl, Adele Krieger, Tracy Schori and Christa Reitlingshoefer.

Potluck Lunch followed by Mysteries of the Northwest Passage and Sir John Franklin presentation will be shared by Cathy and Lawrence on Sunday, January 18th. See you there!

