



The Epiphany of the Lord January 4, 2015 B

Following the Right Star

The following reflections from today's readings are by Alice Camille. She takes a verse from the readings, comments on it and then offers questions for our reflection.

FIRST READING: "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you." (Isaiah 60:1-6)

Light is God's eldest daughter, as the saying goes. It has defined the nature of each hour by its presence or absence from the first moment of creation. We are drawn to the source of light, whether sun, moon or stars, lamplight or firelight, because only in its brilliance can we determine the rest of what's around us.

As attractive as created light is, the ultimate source of light is even more magnificent and desirable. God the Creator is personally hidden from us, but whenever God is glimpsed by prophets and visionaries, it is the glory of God that is described—essentially, God's radiance. Divine glory is so brilliant that it is normally portrayed covered by a cloud outlined by the splendor it conceals and yet reveals. This divine light is unique because it doesn't simply define the presence of God, but also shines on us in a way that illuminates us, too. Remember how Moses continued to shine after he encountered God at Sinai? We too shall be made radiant in the presence of God.

Reflection Question: How does the quality of light affect you in different contexts and from different sources, indoors and out, from malls to churches? What can you learn about the nature of God from the nature of God's eldest daughter?

SECOND READING: "The mystery of God's grace was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed." (Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6)

We don't have to see God with our eyes to know who God is. God is revealed to us in so many ways: through the goodness of creation that shows us God's beauty, and through the story of God's constant response to human failure with relentless acts of salvation. God is

made known to us plainly in the loving surrender of Jesus on the cross. We also experience the grace of God in the sacraments of the church that continue to reveal God's welcome, mercy, healing, life-giving friendship, and call to service. If God seems hidden and obscure to us, perhaps it's that we're not really looking very hard. As with any relationship, the time and effort we put into it will affect whether or not this person grows more dear and familiar or remains in a distant stranger. Daily time for quiet prayer, weekly celebration in Eucharist, seasonal reconciliation and annual retreat are only a few ways that enable us to walk deeper into the mystery of the God who wants to be known to us. Love always looks for a way to communicate itself to the beloved.

Reflection Question: How, when, and where do you make time to build intimacy between you and your Maker?

GOSPEL: "And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was." (Matthew 2:1-12)

All of us are following one star or another across our lives. Maybe it's a dream of the person we want to be, or some special work we hope to do. Maybe it's the fantasy of a person who will love us the way we are sure we need to be cherished. The star we follow may be fame and fortune, or peace and security. We may seek leisure, or ultimate meaning, or the mythical free lunch. Whatever we're looking for, chances are pretty good we'll find it. Only, in most cases, it won't be what we thought it was and the results may be disappointing.

The one star that did not disappoint is the one that led the magi to Jesus. Like most of us traveling in the dark, these men had no idea where their journey would take them or what it might cost once they arrived at their destination. They were prepared to sacrifice wealth, time, and their comfortable security, nonetheless. And when they found their hearts' desire, they too became radiant at what they saw. We can imagine they took that radiance home with them, so that everyone who saw them wondered at the change.

Reflection Question: How do you carry the radiance of Christ out into the world and share it with others?

Another reflection on today's Gospel.

"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have observed his star and have come to pay him homage."
(Matthew 2:1-12)

They weren't Jews. They didn't live anywhere near Israel. They worshipped other gods and they weren't part of this story at all. So what were these men doing in Herod's court, asking about the new king of the Jews? They've traditionally been called kings themselves, and astrologers, and wise men. Their name, magi, shares the same root as magic. But they weren't exactly Harry Potter-style wizards. Still they did practice the sort of arts that Hebrew tradition generally banned. They were, quite simply, not our kind.

Yet they sought Jesus as fervently as anyone ever has, and they were invested in the search as personally as one could be. Herod claimed to be seeking the new king too, but he was a liar. We might conclude that it's not who you are but what you're looking for that defines you in the end.

Reflection Question: What is your heart's desire? How invested are you in pursuing it?

THE GIFTS OF THE SEASON

The gift-giving has mercifully come to an end for another Christmas.

Most of us would agree that the most difficult part of Christmas shopping is deciding on the perfect gift for each person on our list, what best expresses our love and care for that someone, what will bring delight and joy to those we love. Once we know the gift, the trek to the mall is considerably easier.

So what were the magi thinking in the gifts they bring to the Christ Child on this Epiphany? Did they just wrap up what they happened to have with them in their baggage? Were their gifts the expected offerings given to a king—or someone perceived as a king—given with as much thought as a bottle of wine or a Christmas fruitcake?

Or do the three gifts express something special about this Child that these men of learning had come to realize?

*First, the gift of **gold**. Well, you can never go wrong with money, right? But, in antiquity, gold was more than currency. Gold, the most valuable metal on earth, was*

*a symbol of divinity. It was the ultimate gift, the perfect offering to royalty. **This Child, who will be betrayed for silver, comes to transform our perspective of wealth to treasure again the things of God: compassion, forgiveness and peace are the coin of the realm of the newborn King.***

*The gift of **frankincense**. Frankincense comes from a small tree found only in Arabia and parts of northern Africa. The hardened resin of the plant was widely used as a medicine for many ailments: it was applied to stop bleeding and to heal wounds; it was used as an antidote for poisons and as a soothing salve for bruises, ulcerations and paralyzed limbs. **This Child comes to restore and heal not just the physical ailments of those he will meet in his Gospel journey, but to heal humankind of our fears and doubts, to bridge the chasms that separate us from one another and from God.***

*And the gift of **myrrh**. Myrrh was an expensive extract from the resin of the myrrh tree. It, too, was used as a medicine but more significantly, it was used in embalming the dead. Only the very wealthy and members of royalty were embalmed; myrrh, therefore, was a gift reserved for kings. **The Child comes to recreate us in the life of God: his death will be the defeat of death, his cross will be his—and our—glory.***

The three gifts of the magi are a Gospel unto themselves: they honor the Child who is himself a gift from the God whose love is beyond our comprehension, whose goodness knows neither limit nor condition. May we carry these gifts with us in the year ahead as we follow Christ the Morning Star on the journey to Jerusalem and beyond.

(Used with permission from Jay Cormier, Copyright 2010 by Connections/MediaWorks. All rights reserved.)

Have a blessed week,

