

Connect!

Uniting Word & World



Sunday, January 4, 2015

Following the Star

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

Epiphany of the Lord

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/010415.cfm>

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12



The stockings that were hung by the chimney with care have come down and been put away for next year. Santa Claus has come and gone. Christmas presents have been unwrapped and put away or exchanged. Jingle bells have already stopped ringing in stores as after-Christmas sales lure with slashed prices. Soon defrocked Christmas trees will lie on curbs waiting for the garbage trucks or recycling. Much of our world believes that Christmas is over. The Ghost of Christmas Past gathers memories of 2014. They are all that's left. Christmas has come and gone. But...

For the church, Christmas is fresh and new! Carols are sung as we celebrate the incomprehensible mystery of the Incarnation. Feast after feast

commemorates the multiple aspects of the Incarnation. Our church spreads out a rich cornucopia of celebrations. December 26 is [the feast of St. Stephen](#), the first to give his life for his belief in the Messiah. For him, the heavens were opened and he saw God's glory and "Jesus standing at the right hand of God." December 27 [commemorates St. John the Evangelist](#). John began his Gospel with mystical images of the Word who leapt down from heaven out of love! This year the feast of the Holy Family follows in place of the feast of the Holy Innocents. The Jerusalem Temple is the venue for joyous events! The baby Messiah makes his initial entrance and is recognized by wise ones. And we celebrate the holiness and beauty of human love wrapped in the family. The church continues to remember the wondrous happenings in the days between Holy Family Sunday and January 1 when we honor the most

significant person involved in most of these events, Mary, the Mother of God. Like her and unlike our society, we need to keep “all these things, reflecting on them” in our hearts.

In these post-Christmas feasts we are steeped in the expansive, wondrous riches of our church. But it isn't over yet! There's a star shining in the East. There are ancient prophecies waiting to be fulfilled...mysterious prophecies wrapped in images of light and darkness...commands to “raise your eyes and look about.” In that looking “you shall be radiant at what you see.” How marvelous! These awesome, ancient words hold promises that “your heart shall throb and overflow”! Oh, how we yearn for this in our weary, dark world! The prophet, Isaiah, tells of a migration of camels. The caravans advance carrying gold and frankincense, all the while accompanied by shouts of praise to the Lord!

Matthew, the Evangelist, who wrote for the Jewish community, knows well this prophecy of Isaiah. It was meant to instill hope in the hearts of exiled Israelites. Matthew presents a panorama of fulfillment. The star in the East is seen. It is noticed. The wise who view it follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Their eyes are open. Their hearts have discerned a need to follow this star, this dream, to meet the very personification of Wisdom. So they go forth. Political obstacles confront them. Again, they see with the eyes of Wisdom and aren't sidetracked by false lights.

On this feast of the Epiphany, we too go forth. Each of us is a wanderer following stars throughout the whole of life. We are pilgrims from the day of our messy birth until the day of our messy death. Those beginnings and endings were and are out of our control. The in-between time of pilgrimage is a matter of choice. We look for a star to guide us. There are so many flashing lights in our tinsel world. Which one? The choice demands clear seeing and sharp discernment. The choice also demands frequent readjustment. Who among us has not followed a star that lost its glimmer and faded into the darkness? We must move on through changes of profession, changes of location, changes in family situations. Pilgrimage is, essentially, movement...hopefully following the true star. Re-adjustment! Re-focus!

Like the Wise Men of Matthew's story, each of us carries gifts. These riches have been given to us for our pilgrimage and to be returned to the giver at the end of our path with increase! We carry the gold of love, the frankincense of compassion, the myrrh of forgiveness. We offer these to the Christ who dwells within each person we meet. Yes, the star shines over each one. That star is the call of Jesus to follow him. That star is the example of Jesus himself. He is the embodiment of love, compassion, and forgiveness.

Each of the characters in the Christmas drama looked to that star and followed its light. Mary leads the way with her *fiat*. Joseph walks with her. Stephen looks to the star and walks through death. John gazes in mystical union and puts his vision into words. We walk with others in our holy families. We carry our gifts of love, compassion, and forgiveness as we follow the star in union with the Wise Men of old.

Patricia DeGroot, ObISB

PRAYER

Remember us, O God;
from age to age be our comforter.

You have given us the wonder of time,
blessings in days and nights, seasons and years.
Bless your children at the turning of the year
and fill the months ahead with the bright hope
that is ours in the coming of Christ.
You are our God, living and reigning, forever and ever.
Amen.

Excerpt from Prayer for the New Year, from Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers.

NOTICES

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

Catholic Schools Week is celebrated in the United States from January 25–31. Many parish communities hold special events in honor of Catholic Schools. For more information and for resources and ideas, visit: <http://www.ncea.org/our-services/catholic-schools-week>.

COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Church in Latin America the weekend of January 24–25. More information and collection resources are available at:
<http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/latin-america/collection/index.cfm>.

NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK, JANUARY 4–10, 2015

The theme for the 2015 National Migration Week, taking place January 4–10, 2015, is “We Are One Family Under God,” which brings to mind the importance of family in our daily lives. This reminder is particularly important when dealing with the migration phenomenon, as family members are too often separated from one another. For more information and resources from the USCCB visit: <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week>.

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