

In Light of These Developments....

[Text - Matthew 2:1-12]

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This past Friday, January 6th, marked the beginning of the Epiphany Season - which continues until Ash Wednesday, when Lent begins. Epiphany is when the Church celebrates the Light of Christ being revealed to the entire *world* - signaled by the visit of the Magi. The Magi were a group of astronomer/astrologers who searched for the meaning of Life beyond the earthbound. By raising their sights to the heavens, they sought to better understand the Creative Source of Life on earth. And while their story in *Matthew* reveals little about them, it can provide you and me a guiding star [as it were] to help us on our own journey of enlightenment and faith. After all, in order to have an *Epiphany* we must be willing to look beyond our humdrum, daily routines, and be open to the magnificent possibilities that our Holy Source of Life presents us, each and every day.

So perhaps a question we might ask ourselves is this: "What is *our* star today?" For better, or for worse, what phenomena or event has us contemplating the deeper meaning of our lives? It could be the dread or uncertainty of an impending political roller coaster ride; some current news event; or some personal issue, illness or struggle. It could be a positive change - like a new job, friendship, relationship, or outlook on Life. Or it may be something as simple as a comment made by a friend; a passage we recently read; or a poignant scene from a play or movie. Whatever the case, it's important that we pay attention to those peculiar phenomena [or signs] around us - big or small - and consider that there may be something significant that our Divine Source is seeking to reveal to us, through them.

The Magi were actively seeking something beyond themselves - something that could help them make sense of this often complex and chaotic world. And with patience and persistence, they eventually discover what they're looking for. They went to the palace in Jerusalem looking for a Jewish King - and they found one: a devious, egocentric individual called "Herod the Great" [though he really wasn't all that *great!*] Herod ruled Judea as a puppet of the Roman Empire with heavy-handed brutality, and a dash of paranoia - even having one of his own sons murdered for fear of a political coup. This is the king the Magi found in Jerusalem's royal palace - yet he obviously wasn't the One they were seeking. The One they sought was of humble birth - One who would never live in a palace; One who would *give* life, not take it; One whose only crown would be a crown of thorns. Fortunately, these Magi were *wise*-men [or *wise*-women] who quickly saw through Herod's facade, and were not deterred from their true goal.

In a similar way, sometimes in our seeking, there can be things that knock us off course from our genuine goal. For example, we may be looking for the compassionate, caring Christ, yet be put-off by the corruption found within the institutional church. We may attend worship seeking peace and harmony, only to find disorder or discord. Nonetheless, that doesn't mean we're on the wrong path; it simply means that we will have to work through some obstacles in order to find the True Treasure. I realize this may be hard to believe, but there's no such thing as a "perfect" church! There can be, however, an *authentic* church - One where the members forgive and accept, encourage and support one another as *they are!* One where people seek to grow together, more and more, into that Divine image of Jesus Christ. Just like those Magi of old, you and I must be open to where the journey leads us, and be willing to move beyond the obstacles, in order to discover the True Light.

This raises an important step in the journey toward enlightenment - which is the willingness to be open to *all* people. Because if you and I only engage with those who are like us - those with whom we feel comfortable or close - then we will miss out on discovering the sacred component of the strangers we encounter. Imagine if Joseph had closed the door on those Magi, because of their odd clothes, their foreign accents, or their political or religious differences. Little Baby Jesus would have missed-out on some pretty awesome Christmas gifts!

So perhaps one great gift any community of faith has to offer, is to extend a warm welcome to *any* stranger who comes among them. After all, we are all “strangers” to a certain degree [granted, some of us *stranger* than others], but that’s a good thing! Because it challenges us to expand our thinking, to value our diversity, and to treasure the sacred uniqueness of one another, and of ourselves. Every person we meet has something to offer; and often it’s in our interacting with others, that our own Epiphany begins to break-forth.

The great *Epiphany* that Jesus Christ offers to - and through - the Magi, is that Divine love and grace knows no boundaries or barriers!

The great *opportunity* that Jesus Christ offers to - and through - you and me, is to freely share that love and grace, with no boundaries or barriers!

Just as those Magi brought their special gifts to the Christ Child, you and I are also invited to bring our gifts as well. And perhaps one of the greatest gifts we have, is the gift of the *Good News* of Jesus Christ, which lives among and within us. There’s certainly plenty of *Bad News* around us - in our world, in our personal lives, and sometimes even within our own religious institutions. That’s why it’s crucial that you and I - as individuals, and as a Church - continue to proclaim the *Good News*. To work together for peace,

justice and inclusion; to show kindness and compassion; and to raise up that Shining Light of Jesus Christ:
One who came to give life, not take it;
One who came to heal and help, rather than hurt or harm;
One who freely showed love and grace, rather than judgment and condemnation;
One who was willing to live - and even to die - so that the Light of Divine Compassion might be raised up for *all* the world!