Day 1 — Where is the Infant King of the Jews?

MORNING

Take yourself to a quiet place. Remember that you are in the presence of God.

Who do you want to bring to prayer today?

What grace would you like to receive today?

Prayer — Macrina Wiederkehr

Creator of the Stars, God of Epiphanies, You are the Great Star.
You have marked my path with light. You have filled my sky with stars,
naming each star, guiding it, until it shines into my heart
awakening me to deeper seeing new revelations and brighter epiphanies.

O infinite Star Giver, I now ask for wisdom and courage to follow these stars
for their names are many and my heart is fearful.
O Creator of the Stars, You have become within me an unending epiphany.

They shine on me wherever I go:
The Star of Hope.
The Star of Mercy and Compassion
The Star of Justice and Peace.
The Star of Tenderness and Love
The Star of Suffering.
The Star of Joy

And every time I feel the shine
I am called to follow it,
to sing it, to live it,
all the way to the cross and beyond.
Read Matthew 1 and 2

Only Matthew and Luke give us an infancy narrative. And they are not very similar. Why did Matthew add this story about these mysterious men from a foreign place?

Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience. In addition to starting with a genealogy to trace Jesus’ ancestors from Abraham, David and to Joseph, Matthew has the Magi inquire of Herod about the location of “the king of the Jews.”

Consider:

Many themes emerge from this mythical story: journey, gift, anticipation, revelation, fulfillment, the powerful, the lowly, the seeker. What invites my attention?

In the SHCJ, Epiphany is highlighted by a retreat and the renewal of vows – how have you prayed about this event/passage in the past? What have the images found in the story meant to you in years past? What new or different meaning do you find in it today?

Most scholars would call this story a myth, meaning no obvious foundation in history…but myths are used to tell a truth. Matthew, addressing the Jewish community, wanted to affirm Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. What truth does it speak to me personally at this time? What message do I hear for all God’s people?

Prayer

In joy and thanksgiving we call to you, Christ Jesus:
may we find hope in your birth.
Christ, be our strength in our struggle for justice;
may oppressed and abused children find hope in your birth.

Be our wisdom in our efforts to further world progress;
may we use our gifts wisely and treat one another justly.
Be our vision of wholeness in search for integration;
may we bind up our own wounds and in our healing find hope in your birth.

Be our sign of grace in times of despair;
in times of rejection may young people find hope in us and choose life.
You are the Light of the World. Be a light to us;
that we may experience joy in one another’s gifts and find hope in your birth.

O giver of hope, you delight us with the birth of Christ, in whom we find strength, wisdom and grace. Renew our vision during this season that we may reach out to the needs of others in our families, our neighborhoods, our communities, and places of work. In confidence we pray that we may always find hope in your birth. Amen
AFTERNOON

Be still and know . . .

Prayer

At this noontime hour we thank you for the time you offer us to praise you anew and to grow in knowing, loving and serving you in one another. May all know your gift of peace in the midst of chaos. Grant this through Jesus who promised us peace the world cannot give. Amen.

Read Isaiah 60 and Micah 5: 2-4 — the two destinations illustrate significant choices

Commentary: Who is this infant king of the Jews?

The narrative of Epiphany is the story of these two human communities: Jerusalem, with its great pretensions, and Bethlehem, with its modest promises. We can choose a “return to normalcy” in a triumphalist mode, a life of self-sufficiency that contains within it its own seeds of destruction. Or we can choose an alternative that comes in innocence and a hope that confounds our usual pretensions. We can receive life given in vulnerability. It is amazing — the true accent of epiphany — that the wise men do not resist this alternative but go on to the village. Rather than hesitate or resist, they reorganize their wealth and learning, and reorient themselves and their lives around a baby with no credentials.

Bethlehem is nine miles south of Jerusalem. The wise men had a long intellectual history of erudition and a long-term practice of mastery. But they had missed their goal by nine miles. It is mind-boggling to think how the story might have gone had Herod’s interpreters not remembered Micah 2.

Our task is to let the vulnerability of Micah 2 disrupt the self-congratulation of Isaiah 60. Most of us are looking in the wrong place. We are off by nine miles. We are now invited to travel those hard, demanding miles away from self-sufficiency. Epiphany is a good time to take the journey. The way beyond is not about security and prosperity but about vulnerability, neighborliness, generosity, a modest future with spears turned into pruning hooks and swords into plowshares.

The wise men, and the eager nations ready for an alternative, made the trip. It would be ironic if the “outsiders” among us made that move and we who are God’s own people resisted. Imagine a nine-mile trip . . . and a very different way home.

EVENING

How did the Spirit lead me to follow the magi today?
Do I remember journeys that took me to unplanned destinations and experiences?
The story is filled with dilemma and juxtaposition . . .
we can even imagine those who came . . . to be wise women!

Reflection — Wise Women Also Came

Wise women also came.
The fire burned in their wombs long before they saw the flaming star in the sky.
They walked in shadows, trusting the path would open under the light of the moon.

Wise women also came, seeking no directions, no permission from any king.
They came by their own authority, their own desire, their own longing.
They came in quiet, spreading no rumours, sparking no fears to lead to innocents’ slaughter,
to their sister Rachel’s inconsolable lamentations.

Wise women also came, and they brought useful gifts:
water for labour’s washing, fire for warm illumination, a blanket for swaddling.

Wise women also came, at least three of them,
holding Mary in the labour,
crying out with her in the birth pangs,
breathing ancient blessings into her ear.

Wise women also came, and they went, as wise women always do, home a different way.

What is my hope for tomorrow?