

Epiphany

Arise, shine for your light has come, the glory of Our God is rising on you...
though night still covers the earth and darkness the peoples.
Above you Our God now rises and God's glory now appears on you!

Wonderful words - full of hope - confident words - declared to us today -
words declared to each of us - today!

The Wise Men sought that Light - it appeared in the darkness of night - as a star...
stars have been the source of guidance from all time - crossing land or sea -
inspiring hope for direction - but always.... guidance on the journey
and to the source.

It is no surprise that a Star has an important part of the Christmas story - It leads us to the deeper meaning of Christmas.... I'd like to explore that meaning through a favorite story I read some years ago.

It is a story of a 4 year old orphan boy named Tommy. Tommy lived in a home for emotionally disturbed children. The home was attached to a Christian parish with a pastor who truly loved the children, but on this particular Christmas Eve, was being pulled in 1000 directions. His main need that day was to find some time to prepare a homily for the Christmas Eve service.

But families were coming to pick up their children and wanted to wish him a 'Merry Christmas' and in the middle of that, a pipe burst and flooded a bathroom. By late afternoon he had not had even one minute to himself.... then he was called to come help with Tommy.

It seemed that the children with no families to go home with - were having a hard time with the empty places and Tommy, most of all. He had gone into withdrawal by crawling under his bed and refusing to come out or talk to anyone.

The pastor went to his bed and began talking to the 'cowboys and bucking broncos' on the bedspread. He told Tommy about the big Christmas tree with all the packages under it, and how Santa would bring even more that night.... No response!

So he knelt down and lifted the bedspread to see 2 enormous blue eyes looking out at him. He kept talking to Tommy but got absolutely no response and realized that more than words would be needed to free Tommy from his fears.

So he wriggled under the child's bed until he lay next to him and then softly described the big wreath above the altar, the candles in the windows, the carols the children had practiced for the service... but No response!

So he just lay there in the silence looking into Tommy's eyes - joining Tommy in his dark world and ... he waited... then a small, chilled hand crept into his and they lay there together - like that.

The love for this lost frightened boy seemed to pour out of the pastor through to the tight little hand gripping his. After awhile the pastor asked Tommy:

"Do you think we could crawl out and stand up? It's awfully tight for me under here."

Slowly the eyes nodded and they began their slow escape from under the bed. As they stood up the pastor pulled Tommy into his arms and held him until he felt his little body relax. At that moment the Pastor realized that *Christmas had just happened again!*

Love had to crawl into a dark place to gain the trust of a frightened child and slowly teach him that Love would protect him and that it was safe to come out into the light. Only by his entering Tommy's world of fear - darkness and silence - could Tommy understand that he was loved and safe.

Have you ever felt a bit like Tommy? I have! I think we all do at times in our lives and our wonderful God knew that the only way we could truly know God - would be if we could know our Creator in a human form. So God joined divinity and humanity and became visible and loving with us - in all our situations. Jesus experienced all that humans know and he loved everyone - those who accepted him and those who would not - so that we could believe that God is only Love and Mercy..... only Love and Mercy!

Born to poor people in a stable, vulnerable and totally dependent on others, the meaning of Christmas is that God is vulnerable to us - dependent on us... to love others - to be kind - to care about and pray for all those suffering in our world today. They need us! They need our love poured out in thought and prayer - sent out to surround them with the grace that is our love. Since God dwells in us, the love we send in prayer contains the divine Love of God. So many feel lost and alone, vulnerable to war, afflicted by situations beyond their control.

They need a Star.... they need to see hope.... the mystery declared at Christmas is a blueprint for us today. The Star of Bethlehem led the Wise Men to Jesus.... but Stars are not only in the night sky. They are all around us both day and night. If God is Only Love and Mercy, and that is just what Jesus revealed to us.... then wherever there is Love and Mercy - God is revealed.

For Tommy - the Star was the silence of the Pastor crawling into the darkness - hand outstretched -

but Stars can be found at the bedside of the sick -

serving meals to those living in hard times - bringing Eucharist to shut-ins -

thanking the wearied person at a checkout counter and using their name -

opening a door for another - in smiling - in kind words - in sincere listening -

We never know the inner life of another person - what their worries are - what has brought them to this particular place in life... but everyone is on the journey - everyone is seeking a better way - everyone wants what they perceive as peace....

God is as vulnerable today as the Baby in Bethlehem... The experience of Jesus - His love and mercy to all - can only be real today if it is also in us. People are still searching for guidance, for hope - for a Star to lead them to a place of freedom and love and peace...

For so many today - it is an outer place - a country where there is peace - a home and work that can bring security to a family - a cure for sickness - a school where there is no bullying.... a life with no abuse...

but it is also an inner place - a place one can believe he or she has worth - can be valued just as they are - where there is no fear of another -

The message of this feast of the Epiphany is that we are all still looking for a Star to guide us ----- but not to Bethlehem - And the Star isn't in the night skies....

the Star is in the hearts of people who have been to Bethlehem....

The Star is the awareness of God in the hearts of each of us. God is still vulnerable and without the love of others - we will crawl under beds - hide in closets - disappear behind a mask of uncaring and slowly die inside.

Today's readings call upon us to Be the Star - to shine and grow radiant, as Isaiah call us forth...

but also to stand up to the Herods and to be true to our journey -

to reach out to the poor and vulnerable

and offer what we have in our coffers -

the gold of our honesty -

the frankincense of our courage

and

the myrrh of anointing and respect

Many of our parishioners are refugees from the countries of Africa. They are alone in a strange country without a knowledge of English and experiencing the cold weather in a land they hope will be their home... a safe place to raise their children and care for their elderly. We are so privileged to have them with us, to know their courage. Let us thank God for the gift of their presence.

May Christmas be a time of special blessing for you - for all those you love! Know our prayers are with you as we celebrate these Masses honoring the Wonder of a God who loved us - who was not afraid to crawl into our world and wait