

Today we celebrate the great feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. In the context of the Church, the word “Epiphany” refers to this feast of the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. However, in common english, we often use the word “epiphany” to indicate any event or thought which is so profound that it gives you an insight that radically changes the way you will think about things forever. In our Gospel story, the magi see a star and follow that star to a far distant land, where they experience an epiphany in the face of a small infant boy.

As I was praying with this Gospel reading, it struck me that a star is a pretty difficult thing to hide. Clearly, many people other than the magi saw that same star. Yet only these came to follow that star and find the Christ Child and experience this wonderful epiphany in their lives. So this leads to the question, What was different about the magi that they were able to experience this Epiphany of Christ while thousands or even millions of others were not?

As I prayed about this question, it struck me that there were three things that the magi did that enabled them experience this great epiphany. They were watchful, they were fearless and they were generous.

First, they were watchful. The magi are somewhat mysterious figures in the Gospels. They only show up in this passage in Luke. Through the ages, they have sometimes been called magi, sometimes wise men and sometimes even kings. While all of these designations have some historical support, little is known for certain about them. We know that they were gentiles probably pagans of some learning and means. And we know that they were watching for a sign which they found in the appearance of a new star.

So how do we see stars that God puts into our lives as signs to lead us to Him?

It’s not always easy to see the stars in the city. One of the things I love to do when I get a chance is to go backpacking in the mountains. At night, when you are in the mountains miles away from artificial light, the sky looks entirely different than it does here in Hiawatha. You can see more than 10 times as many stars as you can see in a city. The only way to see all those stars is to get away from the light pollution and go where it is dark.

Similarly, The only way I know how to see the stars God puts into our lives is through a life of frequent and regular prayer. We need to take time in silence away from the noise of our lives to examine our lives and ask the Holy Spirit reveal to us those signs God puts into our lives: where we need to change our attitude . . . where we need to be more attentive to the needs of others . . . This is really something we need every day even if just for 5 or 10 minutes. Our parish now offers Eucharistic Adoration every monday evening from 7 to 8. This is a great way to get away from the bright lights that keep us from seeing the stars God has placed in our sky and allowing us to come to the quiet where He can speak to us.

The second characteristic of the magi that allowed them to experience God's epiphany in their lives is that they were fearless. Once they saw that sign from God, they acted boldly, unphased by the dangers that a long journey would pose in those days from thieves and potentially from the rulers of regions that they may have to cross, if they were seen as a threat. How often do we see a star, but are unwilling to pay the price or take the chance. I have found this difficulty in my own faith life. Probably too often, I bow to my fears instead of boldly and fearlessly answering God's call to reach out to others. However, when I am able to overcome these fears and take that chance, that is when I have experienced God working through me for others.

Finally, the magi were generous. They brought gift and were willing to lavish them on a simple mother and child who, by appearances were not any different than many other mothers and children of that day. They didn't worry about how much these gifts might set them back, or how many camels they might be able to buy with them. Somehow they instinctively must have known that that honoring that simple child was more important than all of the things they might have bought with those gifts. Are we as willing to put our own material interests second, knowing that it is more important to honor that simple child in our lives?

So the magi were watchful, fearless and generous and acted out of those characteristics. By contrast, Herod was just the opposite. He wasn't watching for God's sign and had no idea what was happening in his own country until the magi told him. Instead of reacting fearlessly, he reacted out of fear, afraid of what that might mean to his rule. And instead of being generous with the newborn king, he reacted in violence, killing the innocents of bethlehem. Only the watchfulness of the magi, listening to the sign, the dream, that God gave them, allowed Jesus to escape Herod's violence.

It's easy to fall into the mindset of Herod, too preoccupied by life to look up and see the stars, to fearful of change or taking a chance to ever set out and too worried about myself and my needs to give generously to others. I can often find myself falling into these patterns of thinking. However, it is on those times that I act more like the magi, watchful in prayer, fearless in taking chances and generous without counting the cost, that I find God working in me and experience the joyful epiphany that he calls me to.

What stars has God put in your sky? Where do you see God acting or feel God's gentle tap on your shoulder? Maybe there is a family member who needs you or who you need to reconcile with. Maybe there is a neighbor or co-worker who could use a friend or a little help. Here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, our advent series was about reaching out to Metro Mel, maybe there is a Metro Mel in your life you could invite to join us here or a way you see to be more mindful of the Metro Mel's who might come to visit.

Will you be watchful in prayer, fearless in taking chances and generous in responding?