

January 6, 2019

A Blessed Epiphany to all,

It's a rainy winter's day here in Portland on this Feast of the Epiphany. As I continue to relish the Christmas lights strung across the mantel and arched over the doorway, I resist any thought of removing their joyful presence from this room. It is a dark time of year, and sitting beneath these colorful lights today makes more sense to me than venturing into the rain-drenched environment outside my window. I have no desire to hold onto Christmas itself, but I do cling to the light. Epiphany heralds this theme. The star leading astrologers to Bethlehem fits into that yearning for light—light that twinkles with promise, that leads in the darkness, that guides toward the Holy and envelops all present with grace. It holds out hope for an enlightened humanity, able to embrace the 'other', the stranger, to offer hospitality rather than hostility to those who come from afar. The story of the Magi occurs only in Matthew. It is likely the author's creation, written for a community betwixt and between their second-generation Christian identity and their still-intact Jewish identity. Recently ousted from the synagogue, with a growing contingent of Gentiles in their midst, the community was increasingly aware of the universal character of God's all-inclusive plan in Jesus. The author of Matthew highlights God's outreach to the world by setting the story of the Magi within the infancy narrative. After establishing Jesus' genealogy within the lineage of the chosen people ("Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham") Jesus' birth is announced. In the very next verse the Magi are introduced. For Matthew, Jesus is God's self-revelation to the whole of humanity, not just the Israelites. In fact the chief priests and scribes do not recognize him; it is the foreigners who travel great distances to pay him homage. We human beings are a tribal bunch, gravitating toward the familiar, wary of the stranger, and tending toward exclusivity from a position of both fear and pride. The 'star in the East' may not be historically factual, but as a symbol it beckons us toward challenging and dismantling barriers erected to exclude others and fortify privilege. The light shines in that darkness. The star reveals the contours of that deep divide in the planetary human organism that Jesus came to embrace and unify. So as I sit here under these Christmas lights today I am grateful for artificial twinkling stars and stories that fuel the imagination with hope and wonder. I am grateful to Matthew for including astrologers in the Gospel and confronting the antagonism many still hold toward ancient wisdom and meaning gained through keen observation of patterns. And I am grateful that within the narrative of Jesus' birth we Christians are faced with the challenge of opening our arms to the outsider at the very moment we celebrate what is most central to us—God's revelation of love for and embrace of everyone, everywhere, including all creatures and all of creation.

### Mass Schedule This Month

**Mass in Portland** will be Saturday, **January 12**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish for our potluck meal. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

**Mass in Eugene** will be Sunday, **January 13, at First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23<sup>rd</sup>**, at **4:00pm**. A potluck follows our celebration. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish to share. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

### Upcoming Events:

#### **Annual Retreat 2019 – Registration Forms Available**

The annual Lenten retreat will be held at the United Methodist Church in Stayton on Saturday, March 16 from 10am to 4pm. Sr. Carmel will be our facilitator once again! Registration forms will be available at Masses next weekend and will include retreat cost, address and directions. If you are interested in helping to plan the retreat please let Toni or one of the Council members know so your name can be added to the planning team list.

### Pastoral Update:

#### **First Council Meeting of the Year – Saturday, January 19**

Our next Council meeting will be Saturday, January 19, at Ike Box Café in Salem from 11:00 to 1:00. If you are unable to attend but have questions or ideas to offer, please give your thoughts to Council members at the January weekend Masses or email them to Toni or one of the members before the meeting. For carpool information contact Toni in Portland or Judith in Eugene. Portland Council members: Kathy, Mike, Joy and Jim. Eugene Council members: Judith, Carol, Jessica, Bruce and Dianne.

### Website

Remember that the newsletter, current homily, and Council minutes are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming Sophia Christi events along with directions to those events. Our web address is [www.sophiachristi.org](http://www.sophiachristi.org)

**A pastoral reminder**--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn't being met, please don't hesitate to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my office phone number is 503-286-3584. Feel free to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

Luke extends the infancy narrative with the story of a pre-adolescent Jesus sitting with teachers in the Temple, listening and asking questions, while his frantic parents search for him among the caravan of travelers. At the story's conclusion Luke introduces the preaching of John that culminates in the baptism of Jesus. We are told that Jesus is now about 30 years old. This will be our Gospel when we gather next weekend. The readings, as a whole, continue the theme of openness to the larger community. "Here is my servant, my chosen one, in whom I delight," says God in Isaiah, "I have appointed you as a light to the nations." The Gospel echoes this sentiment as a voice from heaven claims Jesus as "Beloved Son," in whom God delights. This "light to the nations" is all-inclusive. It breaks out of tribal and nationalistic barriers to claim the whole of humanity

as God's "chosen" people. When Peter addresses Cornelius and says, "I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality," he underscores the underlying scope of the Gospel. God's self-revelation is meant for everyone. Whether people "believe in Christ" or follow a Buddhist path or bow to Hindu Gods or worship in the cathedrals of nature or find inspiration in the patterns of stars—God shows no partiality. God reveals God-self in every possible way and can be recognized by those whose hearts are open enough to see. As followers of Jesus we are asked to extend the table of welcome to everyone, to feed the hungry and eat with strangers, to treat others as sisters and brothers of the one and only God. How we treat them is what matters, not what they believe. I find myself reflecting on the caravans arriving at our southern border when I think of Jesus at twelve in the safety of his caravan of family and friends bound for Jerusalem. Already a 'light to the nations' he sat among the Temple elders amazing them with his questions and understanding. I wonder how many 'lights' to the nation remain huddled at borders? I wonder about the distorted vision of Christianity barring their entry around the world? We reveal God to each other through hearts of welcome, compassion and mercy. May Christ's light emerge from the darkness and lead us toward each other with gifts of promise and hands extended in peace.

May your hearts be filled with light,

Toni