

January 8, 2023

Happy New Year on this Feast of the Epiphany,

Beginnings are sometimes bold, sometimes cautious, but they always open our eyes in unexpected ways. The 'Epiphany' is meant to be that kind of beginning. It's purpose is to reveal an inner truth we have previously been unable to see. When the veil of mundane experience is suddenly torn away, what is revealed transforms everything. The really REAL is exposed, waiting to be fully received. As a feast day in the Church, the Epiphany invites spiritual seekers of all stripes to claim revelatory experiences given to them from the Wellsprings of Creation, no matter the name they use for the Great Unknown.

In his Time Magazine article of Jan. 6, Professor Matthew Potts of Harvard Divinity School writes: "The word epiphany...derives from a Greek word that means manifestation or appearance. And the word used to describe the wise men, *magoi*, [refers] to priesthood in an ancient Persian religion. Magi were priests of Zoroastrianism, clerics who studied the stars as part of their devotional practice, which makes their pursuit of a strange star over Bethlehem narratively sensible, and their reverent interest in a Jewish child surprising. To first century Judeans, then, magi were priests of an unfamiliar religion, traveling from what is now Iran, and paying unexpected respect to an unremarkable young family in rural Judea. To be clear, there's no sense from the bible story that the magi suddenly abandon their Zoroastrianism as a result of this visit. On the contrary, we're told the magi return to their own land and, presumably, to their roles as astronomers and priests."

These priests of another religion are, in Matthew's account, the first to recognize God-With-Us. They lay prostrate (face-down) before the infant in an act of submission and adoration. Though the Deity they worshipped was known by a different name than the great Un-named One, the 'I AM' of the Jews, revelation came to them and guided their caravan by means of a Star according to their own religious practice. We hear in Paul's words to the Corinthians that "call to be holy, with all those everywhere" who bow to the Divine presence, the Christ presence, wherever it reveals itself, in whatever place it is found. God's self-revelation has been witnessed in a variety of ways throughout time and continues to this day for those with an ability to see. Sacred epiphanies continue, even today, no matter the faith tradition, or the spiritual beliefs of individuals and cultures. Our receptivity, however nuanced, is how we come to 'see'.

Epiphany. The Greek points to an 'unveiling,' a 'revelation,' a 'manifestation' of God's Presence on earth. The unknowable Source of All-That-Is materializes in the fleshiness of a tiny body and reveals itself before our eyes in material form. Christmas celebrates this understated revelation. It is a quiet, nearly obscure beginning—in a stable, among the animals, to an unwed mother and refugee parents. Later, symbolized by the dramatic appearance of a star, the world is awakened! As wise travelers from a different culture are guided to that humble birthplace, the Divine unveils Its Presence in, and to, the world-at-large. These seekers who follow the light of the heavens see with fresh eyes and understand what they see lying there in the hay. The earthiness of the setting says everything that needs to be said—God's Spirit is at home here, hidden in the clothing of dust and straw, in the heart of the earth.

"In [this] ancient story, writes Professor Potts, "the holy is made manifest in openness to others. Hospitality is how epiphany happens. Hostility to ethnic and religious outsiders... leads to the massacre of one's innocent own." The new year begins here, with the Epiphany.

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Online Mass Schedule Continues This Month

Mass via Zoom will be Saturday, **January 13**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2nd Saturday-of-the-month.

Upcoming Events:

Zoom Invitations for January Liturgy

If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies or have recently requested a Zoom invitation to our online Masses, you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month for our liturgy on the 13th. Invitations will be sent Friday, January 12. If you have not been involved in the past but would like to participate in the online liturgies, let Toni know by responding to this email no later than Wednesday, January 10.

Next Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together is January 28th

Happy New Year, everyone! Our first Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together for 2023 is Saturday, January 28th, from 5:00 to 6:00 pm. In addition to our monthly Mass these virtual gatherings are an opportunity for us to come together as a community in an informal setting. There are no expectations around participation so you're welcome to share or to participate quietly, however you're most comfortable. Toni will send the Zoom invitation on Friday the 27th. If you have any questions please contact me at Josephine.miranda64@gmail.com. I look forward to visiting with you on the 28th! --Josie Miranda

Pastoral Update:

Next Council Meeting – Saturday, January 21

Our next Council meeting will take place from 11am to 1pm on January 21. Please send your ideas to one of the Council members, or Toni, before Jan. 21. Portland Council members: Kathleen Glover, Mike Newton, and Rachel Wheeler. Eugene Council members: Jessica Katon, Josie Miranda, Anna Lankutis

Sabbatical News

It's a new year! New years have always felt fresh with new possibilities as I decide whether or not to make resolutions for myself, and how generous I'll be in holding myself accountable for them. There've been a lot of changes over the past couple years as we, as a community, navigated changes to online Masses and maintained spaces for gathering all of us together. In the new year, while Pastor Toni is on sabbatical, the Sophia Christi community has a chance to discern together how we **are** and how we **do** community. Members of the Pastoral Council have been planning ways to make sure our community remains not only viable during Toni's sabbatical but also takes this opportunity to discern ways we might draw on and celebrate the particular gifts, skills, and interests of every member of the community. I'm excited that we have an opportunity to go on considering, after our recent Synodality conversations, what exactly "church" is to us and to craft it to be that, both with Toni and while she's on sabbatical. I hope that all of us will feel excited about this time and the chance it offers to attend to how Spirit is prompting us to share life together in new and nourishing ways.

In the next few months we will be offering some of our ideas and asking for yours. Think about what you would like to see and experience within Sophia Christi as well as what you can add to the nourishment and well-being of this community. As Pope Francis is

showing us, all voices, hands, hearts, and minds are needed and welcome now. The Council will meet again on January 21st and will continue planning for our upcoming sabbatical time. We invite you to get involved! Contact any one of us for more information. –Rachel Wheeler, Council Secretary

Council President, Mike Newton -- newtomike@gmail.com

Secretary, Rachel Wheeler -- rastonwinchel@hotmail.com

Treasurer, Jessica Katon -- jessica_landra@hotmail.com

Portland Member, Kathleen Glover -- gloverconnection@yahoo.com

Eugene Member, Anna Lankutis -- lankutisa@gmail.com

Eugene Member, Josie Miranda -- josephine.miranda64@gmail.com

Staying Connected – Zoom Gatherings and Facebook Options

In addition to our monthly Masses and social gatherings over Zoom, we also have the Sophia Christi Facebook page. You can join the page and check for postings about online courses and other offerings, as well as post information you would like to share. FB also provides the option of hosting a private group discussion in one of its meet-up rooms. If anyone would like more information about this resource, or if you are interested in facilitating a discussion with other Sophia Christi members please contact Anna Lankutis lankutisa@gmail.com, or Rachel Wheeler rastonwinchel@hotmail.com.

Care Team

If you are interested in being a part of the Care Team or have a need that the Care Team might respond to, please contact Kathleen Glover gloverconnection@yahoos.com or Pastor Toni.

Member's Corner – Sharing Reflections

This space in the newsletter is available for sharing our stories, insights and experiences. Consider sending a short paragraph of your own for inclusion in next month's edition. Deadline is February 3rd for the February newsletter.

Website

Outreach has always been part of the mission of Sophia Christi and our website is an important aspect of that mission. The web address is www.sophiachristi.org

A continuing pastoral invitation—In the normal course of life I have the opportunity to meet with you personally when a pastoral issue arises, or you want/need spiritual support. But we are somewhere outside the range of 'normal' now. Please let me know if I can assist you in this strange time we are living through. I am still available by phone (503-286-3584) and you can still reach me through this email address. Feel free to use either one.

When I began this journey with you over fifteen years ago, the human family had only recently entered the 21st century. We were two years into Benedict's papacy at our first Mass in August of 2007, and it would be another five and a half years before Francis would be placed at the helm and Vatican II, once again, became the Church's North Star. August 2007 seems a lifetime ago now. So much has changed, in the world, in the church, and in myself these last fifteen years. The 'call' and 'vision' that launched me on this path decades ago brought me to you, this community, 'Sophia Christi,' and I cherish the many experiences, the challenges, the questions and insights I've gained in your wise and patient company. I carry you with me always. You are there—in my mind, in my heart—as I consider what 'we' are

about and what Sophia, Holy Wisdom, is asking of this tiny cell in the vast ocean of 'the People of God.' There is meaning and purpose in the simple fact that we exist in Her name.

As we move into the new year, and on this Feast of Epiphany, it seems fitting to consider plans, hopes and dreams for the months ahead. Council members have been brainstorming ideas since voting for my sabbatical last June. They have continued discussing what the community might want and need during that time, imagining possibilities, considering who would take responsibility for things like the newsletter, social gatherings, spiritual offerings, communications, financial planning, and pastoral care issues that might arise. They are getting a handle on what will be needed.

It is customary in many if not most churches, for pastors to be encouraged to take a sabbatical every 7-8 years. Spiritual renewal and self-care are required in ministry. When I asked the Council last year to consider offering a sabbatical, the members not only agreed, they thought it was about time! All of us, including me, then needed to wrap our heads around the idea and figure out what to do. The pandemic had disrupted the comfortable routine we'd established and demanded significant changes in how we'd been operating for so many years. We adapted in beautiful ways and faced into the new challenges, drawing on the gifts of Council members, and continuing the monthly schedule of newsletters and liturgies. The community proved itself able to follow Sophia's lead into new territory and I'm confident it can do so again.

Looking toward May, when my sabbatical begins, another change is afoot, and there's no way to know where the road will lead. What is clear, however, is that this is a new chapter in our history, and the timing is beautifully in sync with Pope Francis' call for 'synodality.' Everyone is called to the table, everyone asked to bring the gifts they've been given to help build the *ecclesia*, the beloved community. What do we need to ask of ourselves and of each other? Are we prepared to answer with a willing and humble 'yes' like Mary?

Visiting eastern Oregon last weekend I was captivated by the large blocks of ice hugging the edges of the John Day River. Watching those sluggish wedges, I suddenly thought "my brain feels like that." It's an odd metaphor, I suppose, but the image fits. Winter slows the river so it can rest, deepen. The ice invites nature's quieting touch to enter the river's soul. My plans for this sabbatical are very simple—to listen more closely to the river as it calls me to 'retreat.' What I most need is rest. I want to listen at the river's edge and wait quietly for the thaw, trusting beauty will find its way to shore when the river quickens this spring.

The resting/thawing process will take its own time. I don't know what this sabbatical will look like for me or for you beyond the resting. But be assured, Sophia Christi, I carry you with me as part of the air I breathe. You, the community that called me here and named this *ecclesia* 'Sophia Christi', travel with me wherever I go.

While I'm away I hope to speak to you from time to time, perhaps through this newsletter. I'm fully aware this is a community sabbatical as well as it is mine. You, too, are on a prophetic and ministerial journey as you open to what the Spirit wants you to be and to experience, letting the patterns of 15 years of life together thaw, making room for other expressions that Sophia might suggest, experiment with, inviting your ideas and your talents.

What do you have to offer? What has Spirit Herself shown you, given you, to be used now? The Psalmist's words we sing next week answers with willingness and humility: "Here I am, Lord, here I am. I come to do your will." Sophia is listening and will give you what you need. She guides you and She guides me as we travel the road ahead.

May the Christ within you bless you and your family throughout 2023,

Toni