

# Everybody is called, everybody is sent, everybody can be nourished along the way

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*In a very few days the camels will come across our living room and make it to the manger. January 6 is Epiphany, and in our house we will toast the three who made a perilous journey in hope. Their foreignness serves a point: “nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy shining.” All people are called from darkness to light, all are welcome in Bethlehem.*

With the exception of those few Christians whose ancestors were Jews, the magi represent us as the latecomers at the manger. That may be a surprise. We have become so used to thinking of ourselves (rightly) as God’s people, “a royal priesthood,” as St. Peter puts it, that we forget his first line: “you who were no people have been made a people.”

Epiphany is first and foremost the celebration of the fact that Jesus came for all the world, and that he welcomes each of us, all we bring, and all we are.

Why should we remember the outsiders today? On Epiphany we all are reminded, young and old, that there is a great deal in our culture that can make you feel like an outsider, make you feel like you don’t amount to much, cannot contribute much.

It happens at school, work, and sometimes even at home. Feeling too old, too young, not respected, not useful – those are addressed by the Jesus who says “come to me... and I will give you rest.”

This is the first message of Epiphany: No matter what the world may say about you or to you, you are welcomed by the Christ child, a fellow heir with the saints. Nobody can take that away from you.

Epiphany has another meaning. That is the idea of following a star, of being on a journey. It has almost reached the status of cliché, but it is true nonetheless, that to lay your eyes on Christ

means to set out on a journey.

Young or old, rich or poor, whoever each of us may be, to let God into our lives means that they are never the same again. It means that we grow and change each day as we listen for the voice of the Spirit in our lives, as we seek to be Christ’s person right there in the life we live, with the same family, work, church, and community.

It may look like home, but it’s a new destination each day.

So I hear challenges for myself when I hear the story of the magi. Those challenges go something like this: Look for a star to follow. Look for a goal in life bigger than survival. Realize how much good you can do, how much of a person you can be for those around you. Dare to believe that you can have a real and growing relationship with God. Be on that journey.

Being on a journey, however, has its good and bad points. The idea of always being on the road, always discovering the new, is exciting, sure, but it’s also tiring.

We traditionally depict the magi riding on camels: there is probably no more ill-tempered and uncomfortable beast of burden than a camel, but they were useful because they were equipped for long journeys, and people put up with them.

Finally, if you are like me, you would like to know as much as possible about where you are going, you would like to

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avoid making wrong turns – but without the indignity of stopping to ask for directions. That is, the sense of adventure has a flip side: a sense of rootlessness, of disorientation.

For some or all of these reasons, it is possible to believe in Christ, but hold back from letting God into much of our everyday lives.

No matter what we may think about the value of the “institutional church,” community in Christ is important for the journey. The journey can be hard so we rejoice to come to the oasis, the gathering of God’s people in the church.

A real oasis is more than a filling station or a pit stop. The oasis was a place of safety, of refreshment, of sharing stories with other travelers, of trading tips and warnings about the hazards or changes in the trail.

That’s why it is important for those who take their spiritual journey seriously to stay connected with the community that gathers around word and sacrament. The odds are against our surviving the trip unless we regularly come to where we are welcomed, refreshed, reminded of the directions, and just plain encouraged to keep at it.

Epiphany has a lovely complex of ideas: everybody is called, everybody is sent, and everybody can be nourished along the way. It is our annual invitation to saddle up and risk the journey because we know who awaits us at its end.

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