

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7,10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

Something a bit unusual for me happened over the holidays. If you read the e-newsletter, you know that I had a very evangelical conversation with a stranger on New Year's Eve, but that's not what I'm thinking about at the moment. Something happened over the holidays that was very painful for me and left me feeling quite hurt and abandoned. The depth of that feeling didn't get my attention until I found myself crying...almost non-stop...for several days. I was having quite a pity party for myself and long conversations in my head. Yesterday, I was here at church to teach a Confirmation Class. While I was waiting for my confirmands to arrive, I came and sat in the Sanctuary and had a conversation with God. I prayed for God to take these awful feelings away from me; that He would mend my broken heart; that he would quiet all the anger and hurt stirring within me. And then I just sat here...quiet...for quite a while. I stopped thinking. I stopped praying. I just looked at the cross. I don't know how long it was before this thought came to me, but it got my attention when it did. "Can't you see?" the thought said. "Can't you see all the love in your life? Can't you see how well I have always taken care of you? Don't you know that I know how you feel and I will always take care of you. And don't you know that the answers you think you want are not always the ones that will be best for you? Can't you see that I have never abandoned you and I never will." And then, for no particular reason, I noticed that my tears had stopped; my breathing was smoother; my agitation had quieted; and a sense of peace had settled over me.

"Can't you see?" could be the rallying call for our celebration of the coming of the Magi. There are a number of lessons to be learned about the nature of God in this story about the Magis' quest to find the infant Messiah of Israel and none of them have anything to do with what we know about the Magi. There have been a number of myths that have developed over the years about the Magi. They have even been given names: Melchior, Balthasar, and Gaspar. And their gifts have been identified as gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They've been identified as kings, which they probably were not. It is more likely that they were priests in Zoroastrianism, a religion of Persia that dealt in astronomy. Ancient magi were persons reputed to be adept at astronomy as well as various occult arts, such as astrology, interpretation of dreams, fortune telling, and magic. Here they are clearly thought of as astronomers or astrologers, who have found the rising of a star to be of world-historical significance. It was a common idea in antiquity that the birth or death of great men was accompanied by heavenly signs. When they saw the star rising in the East, they knew that they were looking at something very

special...something of profound significance. In short, they knew what they were looking at. Not only that, but they felt compelled to follow it to wherever it led them.

Other speculation about them included their nations of origin. Some think that one of them came from Ethiopia and another came from India and one came from Persia. Given the geographical disparity of these three places, it would have been next to impossible for them to travel together, unless of course, they were assembled in one place for some reason at the time they first saw the star. We just don't know. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not limit the Magi to just three as we do; they believe that there were probably twelve. Whether it was three or twelve, it was likely that they travelled in a huge caravan providing them with food, tents for shelter, clothing and servants during the long trek to Bethlehem. We don't know how long the journey took, but given that King Herod ordered the murder of all the male children under two years old in order to be sure that he destroyed the infant Jesus, it must have been a journey of several months, perhaps years.

But all of these speculations are about details that don't really matter in the meaning of Magis' visit to the infant Jesus and what this story tells us about the nature of God. Stop and think for a minute...these Magi are prominent people outside the realm of Israel coming to pay homage to the infant Messiah of the Jews. This is our first clue that Jesus hasn't come just for the Jews, but for *all* people. Jesus will spend his entire ministry going to the 'outsiders' rather than to the 'insiders' and destroying that whole concept of who's "in" and who's "out." As far as God is concerned, we are *all* in. The brilliant light of that star shines for every single human being.

Can't you see it?

On Christmas Eve, in the gospel of Luke, we discovered that the first humans to be told about the birth of Jesus were the shepherds minding their flocks in the fields. Shepherds were among the bottom rungs of the social ladder in their world. They were definitely on the fringes of society in Bethlehem. They were looked down on by so many others. They were neither prominent nor notable and yet, the angels appeared to them. The angels didn't go to the halls of political power or those in the inner sanctum of the Temple. They went to the shepherds. God revealed himself to the lowliest among men. God goes to the outsiders, not the insiders. God seems to be making a point.

Can't you see it?

In the gospel of Matthew, when the Magi make their trek to visit the baby Jesus, they come from outside Israel, the home of those who believe they are the ones to be saved by the Messiah. These people of another faith from outside the nation of Israel were chosen by God to inform those in power that their Messiah has been born. God uses these 'outsiders' to inform

King Herod and the Sanhedrin that the Jewish Messiah, the King of the Jews, has arrived. The 'outsiders' break the news to the 'insiders.' God's making another point.

Can't you see it?

God is telling us at the outset of this story that Jesus, the Light of the world, the Light that will dispel the darkness has been born not just to save the people of Israel, but to save *all* people. We need not worry so much about how people come to faith or why they come to faith. We need to question, as insiders, how much of God's light and love we show and share to those who are outside. That's our job. As baptized Christians, that's our duty. We don't need to use this celebration of the magi to pat ourselves on the back that we are the privileged ones who 'get' it. We need to take that privilege and share it with everyone we can find. That's our mission. At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus sends his disciples...that's us...to make disciples of *all* nations.

God has shown us through the circumstances of this story that the Light of that Star, the Light that is Jesus Christ, shines for *all* people everywhere. It doesn't matter to God, apparently, if they have been well-schooled in the faith; if they have come to Jesus through traditional and church organized channels; or if they meet all the requirements of being a Christian in good standing before they are let in. It doesn't matter about nationality, immigration status, income level, education level, occupation, gender, lifestyle or political preference. As Jesus' disciples, we should be filled with such joy that we cannot contain ourselves and feel as compelled to share it with others as the Magi felt to follow that star.

That Light shines brightly all over the earth for all to see and for all to bask in its glow. It's there for all who have the eyes and willingness to see.

Can't you see it?

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.