



Bringing Home the Word

The Epiphany of the Lord
January 6, 2019

Our Undeserved Inheritance

By Janel Esker

Several years ago, our family’s longtime neighbor died. She had no children. My mom had helped her in her later years, so we weren’t surprised when she received some money from the estate. What was shocking was that a check arrived at my house as well. I hadn’t done anything to deserve this money. I had always been polite and kind to our neighbor and had visited her sometimes, but I was amazed at her generosity. Without knowing it, I had become an heir to this lovely woman.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the LORD has dawned upon you.

Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6

The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Matthew 2:1–12

On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage.

On this Solemnity of the Epiphany, we celebrate our own unexpected inheritance—the quite undeserved gift of Jesus. Saint Paul writes that the Gentiles are “coheirs” to this great gift, but what have we done to deserve such grace? Our culture tells us how much we “deserve” (clothes and so on). But from the simplest of places—the tiniest of towns, this little hamlet of Bethlehem—comes a gift we could never do enough to deserve. The Magi recognized this; they prostrated themselves in homage and were changed by their encounter with Jesus. They went home “by another way,” not just physically but spiritually.

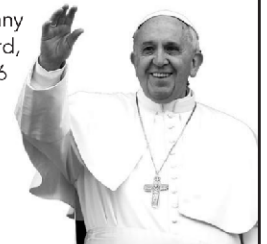
As the Christmas season winds down and the long-awaited gifts are unwrapped and put away, maybe we can look at the gift of Jesus with Epiphany eyes. May we welcome Jesus today like an unexpected inheritance check—with delighted hearts, humble spirits, and grateful souls. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

How many stars there are in the sky! And yet the Magi followed a new and different star, which for them shone all the more brightly....They listened to a voice deep within, which led them to follow that light. It was the voice of the Holy Spirit, who works in all people.

—Homily, Epiphany of the Lord, January 6, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are some of the undeserved gifts that God has given to me?
- Do I remember to thank God for the gift of his Son, and do I share Jesus’ good news with others?



Called to Be Peacemakers

By Kathy Coffey

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).

Forging peace is an arduous job that takes time. As we know from family squabbles, genuine peacemaking doesn't simply gloss over differences. If those aren't addressed, they will surface again like dandelions on a lawn. Instead, peacemaking explores areas of disagreement and seeks common ground.

We who prefer a quick fix may discover that creating peace is a slow process that some compare to the building of medieval cathedrals. Chartres or Notre Dame took about 400 years, sixteen generations in medieval lifespans. Those who laid the foundations never expected to see the final arches. Yet they knew their children and grandchildren would continue their work. In the same way, peacemakers know they may never see the outcome, but they encourage the next generations to seize the baton.

So we look over the centuries to Jesus our model. He came into a country brutally ruled by Caesar, a world that worshiped the power of the sword. Boldly, he offered two different kinds of power. He told the oppressed they are God's children who will inherit the kingdom. To those who can bring about change, he proposed a way of living that would make them happier than privilege ever had.

He asked them to do what they could for overpowering need, as he did—not run away, as we might be tempted. He suggested they spend time figuring out what was bothering the difficult child—not just ignore him. He wanted them to listen through the family conflict—not turn away because it's so draining. He told them to look at unrest and try to discover the underlying neglect or injustice.

Splendid Balance

Jesus didn't just talk peacemaking; he lived it. He began by making peace with himself. Jesus had the internal tensions we all have. When he wanted to preach, people demanded healing. When he wanted solitude, Peter and his companions interrupted. When he sought time apart with his disciples, the crowds surrounded him.

Yet he never exploded in rage. Despite the turmoil surging around him, he left a legacy of peace. Jesus forged within himself a splendid balance between meeting his own needs and relativizing them for God's work. He took time for prayer. But he could also be so moved by the crowds that he set aside his original intent in order to teach and feed them. While criticizing the Pharisees, he also guided Nicodemus, a member of that group.

Jesus teaches: If you want world peace, begin with yourself. We resist people who attempt leadership but carry loaded guns in their hearts. We respect people who name their grievance, then forget it. If we're honest, we admit we should quit carrying angry burdens best abandoned in high school. We also know that the more time we spend quieting ourselves in prayer, the less we're inclined to furious outbursts.

Step by Step

One step toward making peace might be to find examples that we can admire: skipping the perfect opportunity for a put-down; attempting to understand another person's values; finding ways to resolve conflict without guns; becoming more educated about our "enemies"; voting for candidates who seek alternatives to military solutions.

The way Jesus proposes is no easier than it was in the Roman world. Power and prestige are still enshrined; might is still revered today. We spend billions on destructive weapons. Yet Jesus offers an alternative: a way of living that will make us happy now and ultimately. Beneath the sometimes-weary exterior of the peacemaker, he points to the gleam of God's child. +

PRAYER

Lord, your light gives us strength and shows us the way to God. Remove my blindness that I may see the light of goodness, peace, and love within myself and others.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 7-12

Monday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 3:22—4:6 / Mt 4:12–17, 23–25

Tuesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:7–10 / Mk 6:34–44

Wednesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:11–18 / Mk 6:45–52

Thursday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:19—5:4 / Lk 4:14–22a

Friday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 5:5–13 / Lk 5:12–16

Saturday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 5:14–21 / Jn 3:22–30