

**PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS 31 DECEMBER 2020 - 1 JANUARY 2021
SOLEMNITY OF MARY THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**



FEAST REFLECTION

Every new year brings the desire to be better and to do new things. Mary answered God's call to her at the Annunciation, branching out in a new direction. Every time God calls He also calls us to greater intimacy and contact with others. The angel Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy and Mary set out to help Elizabeth. Mary represents the enthusiasm and the energy of youth. Mary is good for us to have around on the first day of the New Year.

The readings nudge us to reflect. The First Reading (Num. 6:22-27) asks God to bless us and keep us safe for the year. The face of God represents His intimacy and His favor towards His. He wants to draw near to us and to be close to us. We look at those we love in the face. God wants us to relate to Him as we do to others. He wants us to talk and to pray to Him. At the start of a New Year, it might be no harm to re-commit ourselves to a more intense and more regular prayer-life.

The reading from Galatians 4:4-7, puts the emphasis on our status as children of God, precious in His eyes. That is a source of comfort and also a challenge, that we behave like children of the light. The Spirit guides us to live as we should. Sometimes we are deaf to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, especially those that will involve effort or pain or sacrifice.

The Gospel, Lk. 2:16-21, gives us the beautiful scene of the holy family and the shepherds, who have been asked to pass on the angels' message. We are ordinary people too and we are asked to pass on the Gospel in our own way in this New Year. It might be by visiting a family with a new-born baby, or some act of kindness we promise to do. These small things can get people to praise and glorify God.

When angels appear, they usually try to get people to do something nice for others. That was true at the annunciation and also on Christmas night. God's revelation to us often pushes us out away from ourselves and to God. We could no better than imitate Mary who visited Elizabeth, or the shepherds who visited her and Jesus.

STEWARDSHIP: The first reading today recalls God's special blessing upon the Israelites. The Lord has been gracious to us as well, pouring into our hearts that spirit which knows Him as Father and makes us His children. May we, like Mary, treasure these things in our hearts and live gratefully!

2 – 3 JANUARY 2021

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY



FEAST REFLECTION

The whole theme of the readings for this feast is about gifts and giftedness. God gives us the gift of life and He keeps us alive all the time. So all of life is a gift. The story of the Magi, above all, is story of giving. They set out in faith. They had the gift of trust. In our world trust is breaking down. We see this in marriage and in the workplace in the communication or lack thereof between the various segments of society. We find it hard to accept the words of another person. We prefer to think that he or she has a hidden agenda.

The Magi had trust in the books they read and the stars they looked at. They trusted enough to set out on a journey and leave home behind. It was a little bit like Abraham who left his country and his father's house (Gen. 12:1). It took faith to leave home and set out like that.

The Magi faced danger with Herod and probably elsewhere. No doubt, they left family behind so important did they believe this star to be. They had the gifts of faith and trust. They were prepared to base their lives on that.

The Magi also had the gift of generosity. They brought gifts. Giving is important. The God who made us did not charge us for the gift of human life. It came free. The gift each one of us is, comes from God. The great minds and hearts that are within us are made by Him. So why can't we be generous and give as much as we can? The Magi were generous with their project. They gave a part of their lives to this journey and they had to leave home to do so. It cost them something.

The Magi had the gift of wisdom and discernment. They heeded signs and dreams and knew how to make sense of them. Wisdom is a great gift because it really helps us to live life. Life is not easy. There are decisions to be made and things to be done. We need to know the signs of the times. We need to dream dreams about the future. Wisdom is needed in every age and we are in need of it in our times. With all our knowledge there is still a huge amount we do not know about the world and people.

The Magi had the gift of sticking at something. They did not give up and they eventually found Jesus. We are tempted to give up and say that we will never make any headway. That is not so. Repeated efforts do bear fruit. Not giving up is at the heart of any commitment. Any persons committed to a job or a partner will tell you that. There is good example here too for our young people. They need to see the rest of us as people with 'stickability'.

Another gift the Magi had was the ability to recognize Jesus when they saw Him. With a very simple manger and a very simple couple it was hardly the home of a king. But they still gave Him their gifts and paid Him homage. We often fail to recognize Jesus in our lives. However plain and simple they seem, our lives are the home for Jesus today. Will we still pay Him our homage and give our gifts in His service? That is the question. The answer comes in the small things we do which no one else on earth can do so well. Hopefully we will respond with full hearts and full confidence.

STEWARDSHIP: The three wise men who came from the East to pay homage to the infant Jesus brought Him rich gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh as part of their worship. What gifts have I brought to this celebration to offer to the newborn Savior?

READINGS FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

10 JAN '21

Is. 42:1-4, 6-7: God announces the coming of the Messiah and His work of reconciliation and redemption.

Acts 10:34-38: Peter recalls that Jesus' baptism was the beginning of His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mk. 1:7-11: Jesus shows His humility by being baptized, and His unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit is revealed.

Is. 55:1-11: Those who thirst are invited to "come to the water".

1 Jn. 5:1-9: Christian life requires both faith in Jesus and love of other people.

Mk. 1:7-11: John baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Spirit. Jesus comes to the Jordan and is baptized by John. A voice from heaven proclaims Him as "Beloved".

SOLEMNITY of THE EPIPHANY

History

Epiphany is an ancient feast, dating to the 3rd century in the East. In the East, the Epiphany feast pre-dates the Christmas feast, although the West knew of the Nativity Feast before the Epiphany feast. Originally the Epiphany celebrated the Baptism of Christ. The birth of Christ was often tied to the Epiphany. The Church in Jerusalem celebrated Christ's Nativity on January 6 until AD 549. St. Epiphanius (d. AD 403) also lists the Epiphany as the date of the celebration of Christ's birth. However, the Apostolic Constitutions (c AD 380) mandates the celebration of Christ's birth on December 25th, and his Epiphany on January 6 (see Book V:III:XIII). In the Armenian Church today, January 6 is the only day celebrating Christ's Incarnation. The Epiphany feast was introduced in the Western Church by the 4th century, but the connection between the feast and Christ's baptism was gradually lost. The Western observance of the feast soon became associated with the visit of the Wise Men. In the West, the Feast of Jesus' baptism is a separate holy day, and currently falls on the Sunday following Epiphany. In the East, the feast of the Nativity and the Epiphany gradually became two distinct feasts.

Various customs have developed around Epiphany. In the East, there is a solemn blessing of water. In the West, in the Middle Ages, houses were blessed on Epiphany. Holy water was sprinkled in each room. The whole family was involved. The father led the procession with a shovel of charcoal on which he burned incense and the oldest son had the bowl of holy water. The rest of the family followed along saying the rosary and/or singing hymns. While the father and oldest son were incensing and blessing the house, the youngest child carried a plate of chalk. The chalk had been blessed with a special blessing after morning Mass. The father took the blessed chalk and wrote over every room that led outside: 20 + C + M + B + 21 which stands for "Anno Domini 2021 -- Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar" and means "The three Holy Kings, Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, in the year of Our Lord, 2021" or whatever the year may be. The letters C, M, and B are also thought to stand for *Christus mansionem benedicat*, meaning "Christ bless this home." This tradition of blessing the doorways symbolizes the family's commitment to welcome Christ into their homes on a daily basis through the year.

Today many Christians celebrate Epiphany, including Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Methodists. However, many Christians have yet to be introduced to the Epiphany feast, as

it falls in the empty space between Christmas and Easter that exists in many non-Catholic churches.

Officially called "The Epiphany of the Lord," this feast celebrates the epiphany (manifestation) of Christ to the Gentiles, symbolized by Christ's being revealed to the Magi (Wise Men). The feast originally was more closely connected to Jesus' baptism, the primary theme of the feast in Orthodox Churches to this day. In addition, other "manifestations" of Christ have been commemorated during Epiphany, including the miracle at the wedding at Cana.

In fact, some theologians throughout history have asserted that the Baptism of the Lord, the adoration of the infant Jesus by the Magi, and the miracle at Cana all historically occurred on January 6 (see Abbot Gueranger's works). This is unlikely, but either way, the Solemnity of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, which falls within Christmastide.

In some Catholic regions, the feast is translated to a Sunday. The Eastern Churches often call the holiday *Theophany*, which means "manifestation of God." Eastern Christians also refer to the Epiphany as "Holy Lights" because they baptize on this day, and baptism brings about illumination. Traditionally, Epiphany marked the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

The story of the Magi traveling from the East to see the Christ child appears only in the Gospel according to Matthew. The word Magi, in Greek *magoi*, comes from the Latin word meaning "sage" and the English word "magic" is derived from it. These particular sages were possibly Zoroastrian astrologers from Persia. Upon seeing a star rising in the East (the Star of Bethlehem), they realized it was a sign that the king of the Jews had been born.

According to St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. AD 107), the star shone with an inexpressible brilliance, and the sun, moon, and other stars all formed a chorus around the special star (Letter to the Ephesians, 19). The wise men followed the star to Bethlehem of Judea, and to Jesus' dwelling there. Then, they worshipped the infant Jesus, and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

There have been numerous traditions that have grown up about the Wise Men. Typically we think of there being three wise men because of the number of gifts, but Matthew doesn't tell us the exact number. Since the 3rd century, Christian writers have referred to them as kings, even though Matthew doesn't specifically tell us that they were royalty. Their names in the West, Gaspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthasar date to the 6th century. The names mean: Master-of-Treasure, King, and Protect-the-King, respectively. The Syrian Church has given them the following Persian names: Larvandad, Hormisdas, and Gushnasaph.

St. Bede the Venerable fills in a few gaps, providing colorful details about the Magi:

The first was called Melchior. He was an old man, with white hair and a long beard; he offered gold to the Lord as to his King. The second, Gaspar by name, young, beardless, of ruddy hue, offered to Jesus his gift of incense, the homage due to Divinity. The third, of black complexion, with heavy beard, was middle-aged and called Balthasar. The myrrh he held in his hand prefigured the death of the son of Man (see the [Catholic Source Book](#)).

St. Bede hints that the magi represent different races, an idea that was further developed around the 14th century, in which the wise men were said to represent the three known races of the time, European, Asian, and African. According to another legend, St. Thomas the Apostle visited the Magi, and after catechizing them, he initiated them into the Christian faith.

Eventually the Wise Men were ordained priests and then bishops. Near the end of their lives,

the Christmas Star revisited them, this time bringing them together for a final reunion. The information provided by Bede, and this legend, are interesting but historically unreliable.

WHEN DOES THE CHRISTMAS SEASON END?

This IS a question that comes up every year around this time. Perhaps it is due to the fact that since at least we have been bombarded with Christmas music, and touching Christmas made for TV movies and various “winter” or “holiday” celebrations. The result being that we tend to cringe each time we hear the sounds or see the displays; just wanting it to be over.

So when is the end of Christmas? December 26, January 6 or February 2?

In secular culture the Christmas season begins around Halloween and ends on December 26.

However, in the Roman Catholic Church, the liturgical season of **Christmas only begins on December 25** and lasts much longer!

The USCCB explains, “The liturgical season of Christmas begins with the vigil Masses on Christmas Eve and **concludes on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**. During this season, we celebrate the birth of Christ into our world and into our hearts, and reflect on the gift of salvation that is born with him... including the fact that he was born to die for us.”

When is the feast of the Baptism?

For those dioceses in the Roman Rite that celebrate **Epiphany** (Three Kings’ Day) always on **January 6 and don’t move the feast to a Sunday**, the Baptism of the Lord falls on the Sunday after Epiphany.

In other places where Epiphany is celebrated on the first Sunday that falls from January 2 through January 8, then the Baptism of the Lord could occur either on the following Sunday, or on a Monday (this happens if Epiphany is celebrated on January 7 or 8).

The latest that the Baptism of the Lord can occur is **January 13**. The season of **Ordinary Time starts on the day after this feast**.

DAILY REFLECTIONS WEEK OF EPIPHANY SATURDAY 2 – 9 JANUARY 2021

**Saturday 2 January Saints Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen Bishops & Doctors
of the Church**

1 Jn. 2:22-28 Jn. 23:1:19-28

“I am not the Christ.” These five words, John the Baptist’s first response to “I am not the Christ” is *Thank God!* There is Love greater than mine. There is salvation and hope beyond what I can fathom, beyond what I may feel I deserve.

Like John the Baptist, Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, whose feasts we celebrate today, spent their lives’ work pointing us in the direction of the true God, the Trinity, who, in the relational dynamic nature as God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, offer us abundant guidance, Grace, companionship, Love, and hope. While John recognizes that he is not the Christ, he continues to go out and do good in the name of the One who is to come. This is what fl strive

to follow in the life and witness of John the Baptist and Saints Basil and Gregory. I am not the Christ, but I have been given gifts, talents, and resources to act in the name of the One who has come and will come again. John was a talented preacher St. Basil was a talented writer and defender, and St. Gregory quietly encouraged many early Christians to live out their faith. We have countless examples of those that have come before us saying “I am not the Christ, but this is how I will do good work in His name.”

It is 2 January, the second day of the new calendar year 2021. New years are often moments of pause and reflection in our lives. So, I invite you to join me in prayer and reflection in the following questions guided by the lives of John, Basil, Gregory and countless others.

What are my gifts, talents, and resources?

How is God calling me to use these gifts, talents, and resources in service of others?

What do I have to offer to my community that will prepare the way for Christ to come anew into our lives?

Let us Pray:

God of community, God of light, we come to You today in gratitude for recognizing both who we are and who we are not. Thank You for the gifts You have given me and the talents and resources I have to use those gifts in service of others. May I strive to live like John the Baptist, Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen – using my gifts to point us in the direction of Jesus Christ. I ask today for the strength, courage, and zeal to do so. Amen

Monday 4 January St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

1 Jn. 3:22-4:6 Mt. 4:12-17, 23-25

I am most drawn into the first exchange between Andrew, the other disciple, and Jesus in today's Gospel:

“What are you looking for?”

“Where are you staying?”

“Come, and you will see.”

That first question, “What are you looking for?” comes up fairly often in my prayer as, “God, what am I looking for?” I would rather God just tell me what I'm looking for. I want a John the Baptist to point it out conspicuously saying, “Look, there it is,” because honestly, I'm not usually very good at knowing what I want. I like that the disciples answer Jesus' question with another question, one of the few times in scripture when Jesus is not the one doing that! Maybe the disciples weren't sure what they were looking for, either, but they thought they would know it when they saw it.

So they ask, “Where are you staying?” What is this Jesus about? Where is he rooted? It's a beautiful way of answering the question about what they seek. “God, I'm not sure what I'm looking for, but show me where you are.” This is, I think, where the rather harsh black-and-white language of the first reading seems applicable: if it is truly good, it is of God. This question requests an invitation to get to know this Jesus better, to know whether he is of God.

Jesus seems to like that request and offers an invitation to relationship: “Come, and you will see.” The disciples spend the evening with Jesus. Afterwards, they are sure – he's the real deal, and no mistake. It's amazing to me that they could be so sure after so little time. I think the

disciples must have been well prepared and open to knowing who Jesus was. When he knows who Jesus is, Andrew becomes a prophet to his brother Simon, like John was for him, saying, "Look, there he is." We, too, become prophets for each other in a community of faith.

Tuesday 5 January St. John Neumann

1 Jn. 4:7-10 Mk. 6:34-44

How does God reveal himself to us? Is some sort of epiphany required for each of us to truly know God – to give our hearts wholeheartedly to our Savior? Today's reflection provides some in depth insight to that question.

As we remember Saint John Neumann's life, we encounter perhaps a modern day "wiseman," we see a man who undoubtedly was touched by God at an early age. That personal epiphany led him to vigorously pursue a life of missionary outreach. That revelation of God and His plan for his life resulted in the founding of many churches and even the creation of hospitals and orphanages.

While immersed in the Christmas season, and specifically as we celebrate the Christian Epiphany, we cannot help but turn our thoughts to the incredible extent to which God works to reveal Himself to us. We marvel at the journey the wise men chose to follow. Do you think they really understood that God was about to reveal himself to them through a tiny baby – a baby lying in a meager stable.

In our Reading today from 1st John, we are reminded exactly why and how God chose (and continues to choose) to reveal Himself to us – because "God is love!" It is precisely through His love for us that He reveals Himself to us. The kind of love that would send His only-begotten Son into the world to save us from our sins. This startling act certainly opens the door for our personal epiphany of who God is and what He means in each of our lives. God's plan, His goal, is to reveal Himself to all mankind. Our Responsorial Psalm reminds us of that promise that "every nation" on earth will adore Him. His judgements will result in peace and justice for all. And yes, we have an obligation as a part of God's plan to take that good news to those He has placed in our lives. Today's Alleluia from Luke clearly reinforces that obligation that we must use our personal epiphany/our commitment to God / to reveal our savior to everyone. So back to the original question for today: **How does God reveal himself to us?**

The intriguing story we find in today's Gospel from Mark provides a detailed example of just how God often reveals Himself through routine daily events of life. After a long day of teaching, Jesus sought to get away with His disciples to a quiet place. However, a large crowd was able to discover where Jesus had gone and, hungry for more of His teaching, crowded in to hear Him. As it was late in the day, Jesus knew that they would soon need food. He met them precisely where they were and set about to address their need for an evening meal. This attention to detail resulted in a miracle of feeding over 5,000 men (plus likely their families) with five loaves and two fish. So what is the purpose of including this story as a part of His Holy Word? Could it be that it is much more than allowing us to see the miraculous power of God? Could it be that it is intended to open our eyes and hearts to the countless ways that God reveals Himself in the ordinary events of our lives each and every day? Do we let the hustle and bustle of our daily routines rob us of seeing God revealing Himself to us each day? I know that I so often fail to recognize all that God is doing in my life – how He is clearly involved with all the little details. How these revelations happen is truly unfathomable – but routine for our amazing

God. God's orchestration of the details of our lives provides a constantly renewing epiphany of God revealing Himself to us – if only we open our eyes & hearts to comprehend.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the Epiphany example that we find in the wise men's story. Help us to see your love as you reveal yourself to us each and every day. Empower us to truly embrace our own epiphany, to embrace your love as we give ourselves, wholly and completely to you. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Wednesday 6 January St. Andre Bessette

1 Jn. 4:11-18 Mk. 6:45-52

*Beloved, if God so loved us,
we also must love one another. ...*

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. ...

There is no fear in love,

but perfect love drives out fear. 1 John 4

"Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!" Mark 6

This is a wonderful day to ask for the grace to let God's love into our hearts and to let that love drive fear away.

Fear is so debilitating. It is especially damaging to our peace, our ability to face challenges with courage, and our ability to love. There are many things that can lead us to fear. Certainly bad experiences of the past can cause fear of the future, fear of being hurt again. Uncertainty alone can lead to fear of the unknown. We all know from experience that the longer fear has a grip on us the deeper it gets.

What is the opposite of fear? What happens when love drives fear out? Fearlessness, for sure, is one result. There is a freedom and even a flexibility and courage. To be unafraid allows us to be bold, even to take risks we never would have taken before. It allows us to be vulnerable and less guarded or defended. Peace and a calm comes, in the absence of fear, that allows us to hear better, see better, experience more fully, and to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit more freely.

John is urging us to love, because God is love. He is inviting us to remain in God's love and to let God remain in us. He clearly states the obvious, which is so difficult to let deep inside of us. "If God so loved us, we also must love one another." We can see the tragic results when we try to love God and not love our neighbor. Our credibility as witnesses of God's love in us goes out the window. We know something is wrong. Upon reflection, we may discover that at the root of our struggle to love others is our fear, our many fears.

John tells us, "There is no fear in love." God's love takes away our fear. Whatever happens to us, we are in the loving embrace of our God, all the time. John describes it as "perfect love" which "drives out fear." God's love for us is perfect - like no other love we've ever experienced. It is un-conditional. God doesn't love us only when, and if, we do this or that. God loves us because God made us; God knows our story; and God is aware of our pain and our sin. God loves us because God always wants to help us be whole and free and loving. It is how God's love works. When we let ourselves experience, feel and embrace the security of that complete love,

our fears begin to lessen and melt away. We can say, "Lord, with your love, I'm no longer afraid." If we say it over and over, this simple prayer becomes liberating, empowering, and it gives us the courage to love others fear-less-ly.

In the gospel, there's a storm at sea. Pope Francis, at the beginning of the pandemic turned to this passage and reminded us that while we are all "at sea, in a storm," we are in the same boat, with Jesus. Whatever sea tosses us around, whatever storm threatens our security, whatever fear begins to take hold of us. Jesus is there to say, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!"

Our role is to be open to, to ask for, to trust and rely on that love. We can choose to live in his love and to let his love drive out our fear. Then, we will have courage and be freer and more centered and readied to calm the stormy seas others are facing, because we know he is with us always.

Thursday 7 January St. Raymond of Penyafort

1 Jn. 4:19-5:4 Lk. 4:14-22

In my part of the world, the dawning of new year brings resolutions – to lose weight, to start that exercise program, to be more organized. I have made a lot of these resolutions in the past. By the end of the first week of the year – right about now – I perhaps would have started to be a bit less resolved in those noble pursuits.

Today's Gospel offers a way to refocus my resolve. Let's set the scene: Jesus has been preaching and speaking in Galilee and returns to his home in Nazareth to the synagogue there. He must have been a bit nervous. Familiar faces can calm our fears, but they also can make us want to do our best. Jesus did not disappoint the hometown folks and offers a new road map for me.

The passage he read from the prophet Isaiah contains a list that I believe can help me to revive and revise my resolutions for the year. I can do my part in my own way for those who struggle, whether it's being kinder to family and friends or doing more to help make the world a better place. The question I am asking myself is how do I proclaim my own year acceptable to the Lord? What changes do I need to make? What small changes can I make that will build on love and faith and justice? How can I live my life according to the commandment in the first reading: "Whoever loves God must also love his brother." I can make my revisions to my resolutions small: I can start by praying for those I disagree with along with my prayers for those who are struggling. That can help me remember that my brothers and sisters everywhere are loved by God.

I pray today for God's grace to help me make and carry out my revisions to my resolutions in proclaiming my goal of a year acceptable to the Lord.

Friday 8 January

1 Jn. 5:5-13 Lk. 5:12-16

*I write these things to you so that you may know
that you have eternal life,
you who believe in the name of the Son of God. 1 John 4*

"Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean."

Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said,

"I do will it. Be made clean." Mark 6

I love this story of Jesus being approached by a man with leprosy. In the man's day, this was a social disease. A sign of "uncleaness" - meaning the person was unable to worship in public. The leper had to live on the outskirts of a town and when anyone approached, the person had to shout, "Unclean!" to warn of his contagious disease and the ritual prohibition that someone would acquire by encountering the leper.

This man falls down in front of Jesus and pleads, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." He reveals to Jesus that he believes Jesus can heal him. Jesus, in effect, says, "Of course I want to." But, first, Jesus does the most remarkable thing in this story: He reaches out and touches the man, to reassure him that he's not untouchable. Then he responds to the man's faith and says, "Be made clean."

When we watch this story, it is hard not to simply fall in love with Jesus. Who does this, except someone who loves deeply? Jesus, completely unconcerned for his own safety, or worried about ritual impurity, just reaches out the man in deep empathy and compassion. Our heart melts as we witness the scene.

The great news is that Jesus looks on us in our need in the same way. He knows how we feel about ourselves. He sees through the ways we present ourselves on the outside. He sees whatever pain we have and he reaches out to us. This story lets us boldly imagine approaching Jesus today and saying, in our own words, with our own pain, "Lord, if you want to, I believe you can make me clean. I believe you can relieve this thing in me that is self-defeating, this thing I "caught" somehow and it has a hold on me and isolates me from others." And, we can prepare ourselves to hear his most gracious and merciful response, "Of course, I want to. Be clean. Be healed. Be set free. Be whole again."

And, when we are whole again, we will be full of gratitude and know that we have eternal life in him. We can be bold in touching and relieving the isolation of other sin pain. What a joyful gift.

Saturday 9 January

1 Jn 5:14-21 Jn. 3:22-30

"Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours." - St. Teresa of Avila

Why bother acknowledging that last year was like no other? No year is like another. But last year, last year so re-ordered our lives that none of us can be sure what comes next. Before last year we made plans, now we try to cope as the sand keeps shifting below our feet. Before last year, we could predict with some accuracy what was going to happen, so we knew what to expect. Not so with 2020, not so. 2020 brought us up short—it made us face the reality that we are not in control. It shook us in ways we had never been shaken before.

I think that is why this line from the first reading of John spoke to me so forcefully: "*We know that we belong to God.*"

If ever there was a year that I learned I was not in control, it was last year. From the pandemic that upended all our lives, to the many personal difficulties that confronted me last year, holding on was the best I could do. It was a year that knocked me off my axis and I am still trying to regain my footing.

Reading that I belonged to God was reassuring. It comforted me in a way few things had in the last year. Then, as I reread it again, I noticed it said "We", not "Julie" or "I". **We** all belong to God.

Given the rancor of last year's election, it is easy to forget "We" means everyone. The color of your state doesn't matter to God because that's who we all belong to.

Our church is reading Love Your Enemies by Arthur Brooks. It describes how polarized our political processes have become. Instead of disagreeing over policies, we now vilify people who belong to the "other" party. We label people who don't agree with us as racist or socialist and feel contempt for them, not connection.

We cannot build the kingdom of God if we are contemptuous of those who think/feel differently than we do. Continuing this mindset moves us farther away from the work God is calling us to do. Our communities, our country, our world are all so troubled, we don't have the luxury to waste our time judging others or wondering "How can *those people* think that way?"

We must roll up our sleeves and get down to God's business. "We" all belong to God and "we" need to start acting like that. But how, how do we bridge this divide? How do we start seeing someone who could support a candidate we can't stand as someone who "belongs to God"?

Again, it is the example of John the Baptist in today's Gospel who can guide us. John was very clear about his role in 'preparing' the way of the Lord. John *knew* who he belonged to. When Jesus began baptizing people, John calmed his disciples by helping them see he (John) was only the best man, not the groom. "*He must increase; I must decrease.*"

While John is talking about Jesus, what keeps coming to me is that my ego, my conviction that 'I am right and others are wrong', must decrease so that God can increase inside me. I need to let go of my judgments and bewilderment so I can start seeing those I label as 'other' as someone who "belongs to God" too. If I can change my attitude, I will be more open to understanding their point of view. Which could foster dialogue and perhaps eventually move us to seeing our common interests, instead of our differences.

As I 'decrease', God can increase in me so I can start seeing with God's eyes, not my limited, disparaging ones. And that will free me to focus on the work of *being the hands, the feet, and the eyes of Jesus.* (St. Teresa of Avila)

PRAYERS



HOLY GRAFFITI

20 + C + M + B + 21

It has been a tradition in a number of European cultures to pray a particular blessing over the home on the Feast of the Epiphany. Known colloquially as 'chalking the door' this Epiphany blessing is one way that families and individuals can invite God's blessing into their home and family life throughout the year.

To ask this blessing of God for your home and family you'll need the following;

A piece of chalk. Any color will do.

The short blessing liturgy provided below.

The blessing is very simple. It involves a short reading from scripture, the tracing of "20+ C +M +B+21" (without the quotation marks) by a family member over the lintel of the main entrance to the home (inside or outside are equally fine options), and a short, shared prayer at the end.

The numbers are for the current year.

The letters C, M, B have two meanings:

- They are the initials of the traditional names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.
- They also abbreviate the Latin words *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, which stands

for "May Christ bless the house."

The "+" signs represent the cross, a reminder that it is through Christ's Passion, death and resurrection that all grace flows and that it will be our family's willingness to share each other's crosses throughout the year that will be the greatest source of blessing for all who abide in and enter our homes.

The Blessing:

All gather near the main entrance to the home. Begin with the Sign of the Cross +.

Leader: "Peace be to this house and to all who dwell here, in the name of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reader: When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of King Herod,
behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,
"Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage."

After their audience with the king they set out.

And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them,
until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.

They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
and on entering the house

they saw the child with Mary his mother.

They prostrated themselves and did him homage.

Then they opened their treasures
and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod,
they departed for their country by another way.

The word of the Lord.

ALL: Thanks be to God

Using the chalk, write on the outside of your house or inside above the main entrance,

20+ C+ M+ B+21

As you inscribe this, you may speak the words "*Christus Mansionem Benedicat*" or simply say "*May Christ bless this house*".

End with the following, brief prayer;

All: Lord God of heaven and earth, you revealed your only begotten Son to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who live here and all who visit. May we be blessed with health, kindness of heart, gentleness and the keeping of your law. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our love for each other may go out to all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This traditional home blessing is a wonderful way to engage the whole family, your friends and even neighbours in seeking the graces they need for the coming year. The inscription above the door will also become an interesting conversation piece throughout the year. As friends and family members come and go be sure to welcome their questions about this unique set of symbols. May your 2019 be truly blessed!

The Church in Jerusalem Epiphany Prayer

O God

Who by a star

guided the wise men to the worship of your Son

we pray you to lead to yourself

the wise and great of every land

that unto you every knee may bow,

and every thought be brought into captivity

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East

Epiphany Hymn of St. Ambrose

Most High God!

Thou that enkindlest

the fires of the shining stars!

O Jesus!

Thou that art peace and life and light and truth,

hear and grant our prayers.

This present day has been made holy

by thy mystic baptism,

whereby thou didst sanctify

those waters of the Jordan,

which of old were thrice turned back.

It is holy by the star shining in the heavens,

whereby thou didst announce

thy Virginal Mother's delivery

and didst, on the same day,

lead the Magi to adore thee in thy crib.

It is holy too,

by thy changing the water

of the pitchers into wine;

which the steward of the feast,

knowing that he had not so filled them,
drew forth for the guests.
Glory be to thee, O Lord Jesus,
that didst appear on this Day!
And to the Father and to the Holy Spirit,
for everlasting ages. Amen.

Hymn of St. Ambrose (338-397), used by the Church in Milan

Morning Epiphany Prayer

Father, You revealed Your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star. Lead us to Your glory in heaven by the light of faith. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen

The Liturgy of the Hours

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK OF SATURDAY 2 JANUARY - SUNDAY 10 JANUARY

Saturday 2 Jan Feast Saints Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen

8:30 a.m. Mass (Preface of Nativity II & Eucharistic Prayer III)

1:30 p.m.- 4:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass Solemnity of the Epiphany

Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer I House Blessing

Sunday 3 Jan Solemnity of the Epiphany

All Masses Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer I House Blessing

7:00 a.m. Mass

8:30 a.m. Mass

11:30 a.m. Mass

2:00 p.m. Mass Brig Mass

Monday 4 Jan Day Off St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Tuesday 5 Jan St. John Neumann

8:30 a.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer III

Wednesday 6 Jan St. Andre Bessette

6:30 a.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer III

8:30 a.m. Mass

Thursday 7 Jan Christmas Weekday (Epiphany)

8:30 a.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer II

5:00 p.m. Confession

6:30 p.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer II

Friday 8 Jan Christmas Weekday

8:30 a.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer II

Saturday 9 Jan Christmas Weekday

8:30 a.m. Mass Preface of Epiphany Eucharistic Prayer II

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Confessions

**5:00 p.m. Mass Vigil Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
Preface of Feast Eucharistic Prayer I**

Sunday 10 Jan Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

All Masses Preface of the Feast Eucharistic Prayer I

7:00 a.m. Mass

8:30 a.m. Mass

11:30 a.m. Mass

2:00 p.m. Brig Mass

Up-Coming

Ordinary Time begins on Monday, 11 January