

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Prayer for Epiphany ~

O God  
Maker of all,  
and lover of what you have made,  
you have sent Jesus  
into my life,  
born of Mary,  
to share my humanity.  
And you send his spirit  
so that I might share his divinity.  
Help me to find Jesus,  
your son.

I need people  
who make his presence real to me,  
through their lives.  
They are the star for me today,  
They are the light  
leading to you.  
Help me to become a sign of faith —  
one who has found the Christ.

I bring not the richness of the sea  
nor the wealth of nations.  
But I bring myself,  
the life that I live,  
as I stand before you this day.  
Amen.

**CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:**  
The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.  
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].

# Our Lady Chapel



*Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.*

**FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY:**

The Feast of the Epiphany is one of the oldest Christian feasts, though throughout the centuries it has celebrated a variety of things. The word “Epiphany” comes from a Greek verb meaning “to reveal”, and all of the various events celebrated by the Feast of the Epiphany are revelations of Christ to humankind.

Like many of the most ancient Christian feasts, Epiphany was first celebrated in the East, where it has been held from the beginning almost universally on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Among Eastern Catholics [both Roman and Orthodox], the feast is known as “Theophany” — which means “the revelation of God”.

The Feast of the Epiphany originally celebrated four different events — The birth of Jesus, the visitation of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus, and the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Each of these is a revelation of God to humankind — at Christ’s Baptism, the Holy Spirit descends and the voice of God the Father is heard declaring that Jesus is His Son; at the wedding in Cana, the miracle reveals that God transforms ordinary things into divine experiences; at the Nativity, the angels bear witness to Christ, and the shepherds — representing the people of Israel — bow down before Him; and at the visitation of the Magi, Christ’s divinity is revealed to the Gentiles — the other nations of the earth.

Eventually, the celebration of the Nativity [Christmas] became separate among Western Christians, but the Feast of the Epiphany still commemorated the Baptism, the first miracle, and the visit from the Wise Men. Thus, The Feast of the Epiphany came to mark the end of Christmastide — or the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Over the centuries, the various celebrations were further separated in the West, and now the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the weekend following the Feast of the Epiphany, and the wedding at Cana is commemorated on the weekend after the Baptism of the Lord.

In many parts of the world [outside the West], the celebration of Epiphany is even more important than the celebration of Christmas. In many places in the world, Christians still exchange gifts on the Epiphany — the day on which the Wise Men brought their gifts to the Christ Child.

**FAITH EDUCATION — JANUARY DATES:**

Faith Education is an important part of every person’s formation. Please make sure that you have not forgotten this important responsibility. Our Sessions go from **8:45—9:45 AM, on Sunday mornings**, with the hope that our children would then **participate in our 10:00 AM Family Mass**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility. **Meeting dates for January: 12 & 26.**

**CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:**

Again this year we will accept memorial donations to help defray the cost of flowers and decorations which we use in our chapel for the Christmas season. If you are interested in making a donation **in memory of loved ones**, please put the names of the loved ones along with your donation in an envelope, mark it “Christmas Flowers,” and either give it to Father John or drop it in the offering basket. **Please keep the following people in your prayers: In memory of Pat Redmond, and the Blazek, Rezabek, Heryak, Orehek, Tran, and Wyrwas families.** We will publish the names of your loved ones in the Bulletin as a memorial throughout the Christmas season.

**PURE JOY:**

Gratitude can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. It makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

—Melody Beattie

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

**PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:**

- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is seriously ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For Debbie Langer, friend of Cindy Frimel, who was diagnosed with brain cancer.
- For Nada Kucmanic, who is seriously ill.
- For Josephine Fernando, who is seriously ill.
- For Father Ray Sutter, pastor emeritus of St. Matthias Parish, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Nick Chiacchiarri, father of Mark Mark Chiacchiarri [‘94], father-in-law of Michelle Chiacchiarri [‘96], and grandfather of Aurelia [‘28], and Olivia [‘30] Chiacchiarri, who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Father Larry Jerge, C.S.C., who is under the care of hospice
- For Thomas Noble who is undergoing treatment for cancer.

**PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For Joan Houlahan.
- For Brother Joe LeBon, C.S.C., long-time member of the faculty of Archbishop Hoban
- For Marian Matlock, sister of Fr. Jim Martin, C.S.C.
- For Judith Lazuka, mother of Walter [‘86], Christopher [‘88], Joseph [‘89], Stephen [‘91], Scott [‘93] and current parent, Paul Lazuka, father-in-law of Maureen Eville [‘90], grandmother of Alex [‘27], Sophia [‘28], and Maeve [‘36] Lazuka.
- For Beverly Cox, grandmother of Zachary Cox [‘26]
- For Barbara Hughes
- For President Jimmy Carter
- For Sabrina Kumar
- For John Skerl, uncle of Emily Skerl [‘16]
- For Father Thomas Lemos, C.S.C.
- For Margaret Thompson, friend of Joyce Toth.
- For Grace Strapka

**PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:**

- For the victims of the mass killing in New Orleans and for their families.
- For the victims of the plane crash in Korea, and for their families
- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas, and Russia and Ukraine.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For an end to violence in our society in all of its forms.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

**THE BEST IS YET TO COME:**

Our ancestors in the faith celebrated the feast of Epiphany long before they celebrated Christmas. Originally it was a three part celebration — each segment having something to do with “discovering” Jesus. The first revolved around the magi; the second, Jesus’ baptism; and the third, the wedding feast at Cana. In each instance, Jesus is revealed as being someone out of the ordinary.

Those who put statues of the “three kings” in front of a Bethlehem stable crib set haven’t read Matthew’s narrative of the event [Matthew 2:1-12]. There is no stable in his infancy passages — no angels, no shepherds. We’re to presume Bethlehem is Joseph and Mary’s hometown. They didn’t travel there from Nazareth because of a Roman census. And the magi didn’t arrive within 12 days of his birth. According to Matthew’s account, the encounter of the magi with Jesus could have happened when he was a couple of years old.

But more to the theological point. Without knowing it, many of us through the years, have bought into St. Bonaventure’s theological principle of “potuit, deuit, ergo fecit” [“he could do it, it would make sense if he did it, therefore he did it”]. The “he” is God. I remember as a child hearing that kind of argument used to prove the Blessed Virgin Mary was the most physically beautiful woman who ever lived. Isn’t God able to create such a woman? Doesn’t it make sense that he’d give that exceptional beauty to his son’s mother? Therefore Mary was the world’s most beautiful woman.

One of the reasons that the bible is so thick is that its writers never followed that type of theologizing. Our sacred authors’ reasoning went: “He could do it, it would make sense if he did it, but he almost never does it that way.” Nowhere is this more evident than in Matthew’s story of the magi.

It would certainly make sense that Jesus would be initially “discovered” by a group of holy, pious, bible-savvy Jews. But that’s not the way that God engineered Jesus’ “coming out”. Not only aren’t the magi Jewish, they’re practicing a type of pagan religion which, according to Exodus, should get them stoned the instant they cross into the Holy Land. They’re astrologers — people who look to the stars and planets to determine God’s will in their lives. Jews were absolutely forbidden — under the same pain of death — to engage in such endeavors.

We also see that same pattern of unpredictable God-ordered events in other parts of the Bible. Though one of Isaiah’s prophetic goals is to get his fellow Jews to return to Israel after the Babylonian Exile, he’s convinced that, even if they don’t come back, non-Jews will still make Jerusalem a place of pilgrimage — “The wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord” [Isaiah 60:1-6].

In the same vein, the Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus reflects on one of earliest Christianity’s most surprising events — “Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” [Ephesians 3:2-6]. No one could have predicted that a Jewish reform movement would eventually be the driving force behind a non-Jewish faith.

Maybe we Christians should make Al Jolson’s famous line — “You ain’t seen nothin yet!” — a mantra for our faith — especially after reading what the scriptures say about this feast.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

**A PRAYER:**

O my God, fill my soul with holy joy, courage and strength to serve You. Enkindle Your love in me and then walk with me along the next stretch of road before me. — St. Benedicta of the Cross [Edith Stein]

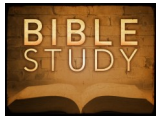


**NEXT BIBLE STUDY — THURSDAY, January 23<sup>rd</sup>:**

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Thursday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word.

**Our topic: What is the Jubilee Year**

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..



**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

Sunday, January 5: <b>Epiphany</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In-Person & Live Stream
Monday, January 6: <b>St. André Bessette</b>	<b>NO MASS</b>
Tuesday, January 7:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Wednesday, January 8:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Thursday, January 9:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Friday, January 10:	<b>NO MASS</b>
Saturday, January 11: <b>Baptism of Jesus</b>	<b>5:00 PM</b> In Person only
Sunday, January 12: <b>Baptism of Jesus</b>	<b>10:00 AM</b> In-Person & Live Stream

**A YOUNG ADULT GROUP:**

The Young Adult group will be holding their next meeting at 11:45 AM on Sunday, January 12<sup>th</sup>. We will be discussing what it means to be a “Wise Man” in today’s world. Location TBD, because the Chapel & the Lennon Boardroom will be used for taking down the Christmas decorations. Here is an opportunity to get together, share some time in faith, and also to support each other in life’s journey, as we continue to grow and become the people that God wants us to be. If you are interested and would like to be part of this new adventure, please join us at our next meeting, or contact Richard Jones, Stephanie Leonor, Joe Gurney, or Edwin Heryak. Of course, you can also contact Father John at the chapel if that would be easier for you. God bless you.



**2025 CALENDARS:**

Calendars for the year 2025 are available for your taking. Besides having space for you to write your family appointments, the calendar also contains information about Mass and Reconciliation times here at Our Lady Chapel. We wish to thank the Schulte-Mahon-Murphy Funeral Homes for their generous donation of these 2025 Calendars to us. Please feel free to take as many calendars as you would like. Thank you.



**REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S THEME:**

As we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany this weekend, we are invited — on this Day of Revelation — to be women and men of “manifestation” ourselves. It is not so much about the gifts that we have to present to Jesus; rather, it is about the gifts that God has given us for the purpose of revealing to others some particular feature of God’s personality.

Human efforts are generally involved in discoveries that occur in the natural world. We must try many different angles or approaches before discovery occurs. Complex facts must be assessed or unraveled before we can see the path to solve a problem or explain a situation, and the answers we formulate are sometimes controversial. They are also subject to revision as we continue to add to our partial knowledge. We do not always see so clearly at first, but clarity may come over time.

These human dimensions of manifestation are present in the Epiphany of our Lord. Isaiah’s prophetic words speak of revelation manifested in light piercing through clouds and darkness that cover the earth and all its peoples [Isaiah 60:1-6]. Back in 1968, the Apollo 8 astronauts had a very unique experience — as they circled the earth from a vantage point that no human had ever seen before, they began reading from Genesis. They began to see that Light does indeed shine in the darkness. But we who dwell in the midst of trouble and confusion cannot always see the beauty of that light.

Yet as we discover the ongoing depths of God’s revelation, we are called to be vehicles of this revelation in our own lives. What of God do we reveal? At the end of their visit to the Christ-child [Matthew 2:1-12], the Magi went off with a mission — to share what they had received in this “marvelous exchange”. We too need to live our lives with the same sense of mission. Jesus does not stay a child, nor does he remain in Bethlehem or Nazareth. To experience Jesus’ manifestation in our lives is to become ourselves the gift —and that will take much grace and time. Secrets are exciting, and when one is shared with us that energy changes to intimacy and a sense of being special. When the information becomes public and generally known, that specialness is dimmed.



Israel had a long history of being intimate and special through the covenants made by God. They were not exactly secrets, but the “One God” was sharing with this one nation information or revelation of Who this “One God” was. Their history was a continuous intensification of their own image and the image of God for them. They were promised a Messiah, and in the past weeks, we have heard of the miracles and fruitfulness which would accompany His arrival.

The prophet Isaiah foretells that this Messiah — this kind of secret — is going to be shared beyond the borders of Israel. The nation will still be special because people from the sea to the desert will come to visit the glory of God manifested in Jerusalem and Israel. The riches of other lands will come in recognition of the presence of a new brilliance which has shined upon this little place — this little spot — on the earth. This, along with other prophecies, moves the secret more outward making the whole world bright, and enlightened by the Light of this new revelation. God claims all people as special — as belonging to this “One God”.

The image of sons and daughters coming together from afar strikes a particularly beautiful chord, as many of us long for family unity and reconciliation. Abundance and riches are also part of Isaiah’s vision, but they would have no value apart from the fulfillment of the reconciliation promised here. Riches without security spell trouble: someone will destroy your peace by taking them from you while you live, and they will provide no comfort when you die.

- A righteous man named Joseph was present at both his birth and his death [Luke 2:16; Luke 19:38]
- Jesus was pronounced “King of the Jews” at each [Matthew 2:2; John 19:19]

Both events took place on a hill, on the outskirts of Jerusalem — Bethlehem and Calvary are both set within many hills. Both Jesus’ birth and death/Resurrection were foretold in advance [prophecy]; both were miraculous; and both involved God “emptying” Himself for us; and both events ultimately lead to our salvation.

How divine that the same eyes which welled with joyful tears one starry night in Bethlehem also shed the broken tears of a widowed mother holding the same blessed Body years later. The only thing separating the Nativity from *The Pieta* is time and perspective. The wooden manger lay in the shadow of a wooden cross. Joseph held and wiped the blood off his new baby boy that night in Bethlehem, and Joseph of Arimathea would share a similar honor three decades later.

Furthermore, Biblical scholars affirm that it was not a barn, but a cave hewn out of rock that served as the first Christmas tabernacle, which is a perfect mirror image to the Easter tabernacle of the rock-hewn tomb. It was out of a cave that the Word became flesh, and out of a cave that the Word breathed life once again. Both caves acted as a starting point for heaven — although both were “ending points” in the eyes of earth.

Now, some people like to look upon these consistencies as “proof” that the stories must be false or deemed pure myth. However, that point of view is painfully short-sighted; not only does this way of thinking fail to respect God’s providence, it also goes against the written prophecies penned centuries earlier by distinctly different authors who were not contemporaries. These guys didn’t compare “notes.” No, these similarities were part of God’s divinely inspired design, showing us all the inseparability of the two events. Christmas and Easter are like two sides of the same coin.

God is not “ironic”; He is, however, omnipotent, providential, and sovereign — big ways of saying all-knowing, all-directing, and all-powerful. His plan, from the beginning, was to save us. That is why we say that Jesus “was born to die.” When God emptied Himself and took flesh [Philippians 2:7-9], He was on a mission. Christ came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. In both of these events, history and the future were both irreversibly changed forever. How fitting that the two most important events in the drama that we call history would be linked by the same cast of “characters.”

Bethlehem and Calvary are less than seven miles apart geographically — they are even closer in the heart of God.

Contemplate these things in your heart as we live through this Christmas season. In Jesus’ birth, we celebrate His life, which resulted in His death, which offered us all new life — in Him.

How’s that for a Christmas gift?

—Mark Hart

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord’s invitation: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” [Jeremiah 24:7].

**MARVELING:**

I want to reflect today on our ability to marvel. Being able to marvel is a secret for moving forward well as a family and as individuals — not getting used to the ordinariness of things; knowing instead how to marvel at God who accompanies us. I think it is good for couples to know how to marvel at one’s own spouse, taking him or her by the hand, for example, and looking the other tenderly in the eyes for a few seconds in the evening. And then in the eyes of our children. Marveling always leads to tenderness.

—Pope Francis 17

## THE CROSS OF CHRISTMAS:

Several years ago, my then fiancé and I made our way through the frigid streets of Rome one dark January morning. Hoping to beat the crowds, our deepest desire was to have some quiet time to pray together in St. Peter's Basilica the day before our wedding. Upon entering this glorious Sanctuary for the first time, we were immediately rendered speechless by the beauty surrounding us. We weren't even ten feet in the door before seeing one of the history's most famous works of art — *The Pieta* by Michelangelo.

The statue had always fascinated me. Beyond the incredible artistry and exquisite detail, for me *The Pieta* was an invitation into the heart and mind of God — and Mary. The faithful yet sorrowful Mother holding her heroic yet lifeless Son — what a tragic “end” to a miraculous life! How often have we not thought about that on an eerie Good Friday afternoon? Of course, as Christians we have the advantage of looking at Good Friday in retrospect. Twenty centuries later, we know that the miraculous end to Good Friday would be revealed on Easter Sunday morning.

As it is with the Christian life, if we want to see clearly — as God sees — we have to look at the “big picture” of salvation. If we want to understand Jesus' death, for instance, we need to begin with His birth, and when we do, we will undoubtedly learn something very interesting — that He was born to die. If you want to get technical, that “pieta” moment first occurred not on Calvary, but in Bethlehem. The manger's wood was a foreshadowing — it is the “cross” of Christmas. There is far more going on at Jesus' birth than many of us realize upon first glance.

Christmas is one of the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary. But at first glance, the Joyful Mysteries might not appear that joyful. Consider these moments from the Gospel — a teenage virgin is pregnant, but not with her husband's child. The girl then leaves home for three months and later travels 90 miles by donkey in her third trimester of pregnancy. She then gives birth in a cave surrounded by animals, hears from a prophet that both she and her child will suffer greatly, and then, to top it all off, she and her husband have their pre-teen son — the son of God — go missing for three days.

Most would not consider these moments very joyful. Upon further reflection on these mysterious events, however, you begin to see that they are actually a cause for intense joy. God was on a rescue mission to save us — you and me — and that mission included some courageous souls fighting through some incredibly challenging and painful situations. Not only do the Joyful Mysteries walk us more deeply into the conception, birth, and childhood of our Lord Jesus, they reveal to us a God who is madly in love with us — a God who will stop at nothing to save all of us from death.

There's a famous saying — “in order to be successful, you should begin with the end in mind.” If that is the case, there is no better example of “success” than the Gospels. God, quite obviously, had a detailed plan to save us — as the birth and the death of Jesus have striking similarities. **Consider just these few parallels between Bethlehem and Calvary:**

- Angels are present during Jesus' birth, death, and Resurrection [Luke 2:13; Matthew 26:53; John 20:12].
- Mary, our Mother, is present in both accounts [Matthew 2:11-13; John 19:26-27].
- In both scenes, Jesus was draped in swaddling clothes [Luke 2:7; Luke 23:53]
- Each event was accompanied by a celestial act/sign [Matthew 2:2; Matthew 27:45]
- The wooden manger lies between two animals, the wooden cross between two thieves [Isaiah 1:3; Luke 2:12; Luke 23:33]



Generations waited for these words to be fulfilled. The incarnation of our Lord had indeed brought a glorious light to dwell on earth, and that light was to shine upon all. But not all could understand or see the light. Saint Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus confirms this experience — the mysteries hidden in past times have now been revealed, bringing reconciliation to both Jew and Gentile. The apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, brought further clarity to the mystery as they grew in understanding of all that our Lord taught them [Ephesians 3:2-6].

The story of the Magi is unique to Matthew's Gospel [2:1-12]. The story presents Jesus as both the One Who is to come, and the One who has come for all. The Magi represent the “beyond” or distant lands, and peoples to whom the Christ will offer His universal wisdom. These “Wise Men” also represent the former ways of thinking, wondering, and philosophizing. They come in a sign of surrender to this new “epiphany” — or display of this “One God” Who is for all, and is now known as the God Who does the seeking and the finding. The Magi are the figures of the world who did the seeking for — and the finding of — God. The Light is initiated by God, and this Light is meant for the whole world.

As with the shepherds, these wise men continue in a liturgical manner. They arrive, having wandered in faith, have an offertory procession, a time of adoration, and then a sending. Were they totally satisfied by the whole experience of stars, warnings, findings? They were somehow missioned by the encounter to go farther and further and deeper. Like the shepherds they were changed, and then sent back into the mundane of usual life.

The gifts which the Magi had presented represent what had been valuable to these seekers; they leave these gifts at the “house” and then leave by “another way” — things have changed. They have not so much found as they have been found, and they leave that place to begin spreading the news of the Finder whom they found.

This is all a grand ending and beginning. The Magi-story is the revelation that mere human wisdom searches for more than it can understand. The Wanderers, who have come from afar in distance and time, arrive not at an idea or principle, but at the mystery of a Person. And so must we as well. We like to think of God, arrive at our own logical, reasonable concept of God, and we love to say that we have found God. If we determine Who and What God is, then we would seem to control God. God would have to act accordingly. In prostrating themselves, the Magi admit their former human arrogance and surrender to the truth that until then, they had not been satisfied with the conclusions of their personal ponderings.

The Epiphany is a grand revelation that God will not be found to satisfy human thinking. This seeking of us by God encourages us to live with the dissatisfactions of our hearts. Jesus has come among us — and within us — to accompany our spirits, and not merely slake the thirsts of thought. We are invited to lay down our intellects, as precious gold — which they are. We — like the Magi — pick up our lives which have been met, found, and sent off — the better for the finding.

It can be assumed that, as with the shepherds before them, the Magi went back by “another way” — not merely geographically. They return to a new and different way of relating with life. Their hearts and spirits are comforted, and their minds still turning these things over in wonder — not a bad way to journey. The seeking is God's labor; the being found is ours. For us finding is less lively than seeking. When we hear that we should seek and find, what Jesus and the Magi teach us is that human finding will always lead to some kind of dissatisfaction — and so the seeking re-begins.

The Magi did not stay at the place to which the star guided them. Nobody who came to find Jesus — from the shepherds to those seeking Him within the tomb — were ever allowed just to stay nice and close to Him, the finder. He moved them along in their human-heart search. This too is not a bad, but rather holy way to journey.

Jesus is not the reward for those who can figure Him out by deep thinking. There are those whose deep thinking stumbles over the manger and all that it means. They are humbled by their not being able to figure it all out, and so they go back by the same way they came. When they find something which



satisfies their intellects, they will feel good egotistically about themselves — even if what they find is that there never was a manger, stars, a Baby wrapped in the love of the Creator of mangers.

We today live downstream from these events, and yet we also must dwell with uncertainty, waiting patiently for all to be fulfilled. Like the faithful of old, we must walk in the light we have. We have gifts they did not enjoy, including life supported by the sacraments and the Church, but we also must persist in hope despite a world of trouble and confusion, guided by divine light. We do not satisfy our egos by ultimately finding Jesus as an answer, but we find ourselves humbled by being found not as an answer, but a way to live with our wonderings.

Do not forget: Christ has come. Christ is here. Christ is coming again. Thanks be to God.

—taken from the writings of Edward Morse and Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

### WHAT DO WE SEEK?

From Advent until now, the Scripture Readings and themes of our liturgies have all centered-on God’s coming to us. The underlying movement has been God seeking us out and offering Himself to us in His Son, in the Word made flesh — Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah first promised to the descendants of Adam and Eve after their Fall. But in the Feast of the Epiphany, the basic movement shifts — now it’s all about our seeking, specifically our seeking out God in His Christ. The Magi we need to note were not Jews. They were the representatives of the gentile nations and peoples. They were kings who were sages, wise men, visionaries, men who searched beyond what is obvious; searching into the mysterious non-scientific world in which we exist as distinguished from what is merely technical and material.

Hidden in the word “question” is the word “quest” — an idea that’s presented to us in Matthew’s gospel account. Epiphany invites us to join in the quest of the Wise Men as well as the quest of all Christian believers seeking to enter into the mystery of God — particularly the mystery of God become incarnate in our humanness.

We live in a world of problems to be solved. A mystery, however, is not a problem to be solved — it is a quest to be lived. A well-known sports figure was asked what his chief ambition in life was. He replied: “My chief ambition is to go to heaven.” The sportswriter who was interviewing him thought it was a joke. The ball player responded: “My friend, I don’t think that’s funny. I know you don’t mean to be a smart aleck, but there’s something wrong with a person’s attitude when he’s flippant about the great mysteries of the universe.” And the man who spoke these words was a professional baseball player.



We, too, can be superficial when we miss the point in the Scripture account of the Magi [Matthew 2:1-12]. We can get all wrapped up in solving the problem about where the star came from, where it was located in heaven, who the Wise Men really were, and where they came from, and exactly how a heavenly star could guide them. So, too, when people try to analyze Christ’s miracles, attempting to explain them away by finding natural causes, completely missing God’s revelation that is made evident to us in them.

The gifts of the Magi are meant to express our human awe and reverence at the true inner nature of the Christ child. Worldly powers, represented by the Three Kings, along with their powers of government over peoples, are placed at His feet. Gold — the currency of kings — is given to Him. Frankincense is the gift given to priests — bringing us into contact with the world of mystery and transcendence. Myrrh is an ointment used in the preparation of a body for burial — its significance being

by showing some raw muscle power and banging some heads here and now. We are impatient with quiet, moral power that demands infinite patience and a long-term perspective. We want a hero — someone with the blazing guns of a Hollywood superhero, but the heart of a Mother Theresa. The guns of the world blasting away evil — that’s what we want from our God — not the power of a baby lying mute and helpless against the cruel powers of our time. Like the Israelites facing the Philistines, we are reluctant to send a shepherd boy against an ironclad giant [see 1 Samuel 17]. We want divine power in iron, muscles, guns, and charisma.

But that’s not the way intimacy, peace, and God are found.

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

### READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

**Monday:** 1 John 3:22-4:6, Matthew 4:12-25

**Tuesday:** 1 John 4:7-10, Mark 6:34-44

**Wednesday:** 1 John 4:11-18, Mark 6:34-44

**Thursday:** 1 John 4:19-5:4, Luke 4:14-22

**Friday:** 1 John 5:5-13, Luke 5:12-16

**Saturday:** 1 John 5:14-21, John 3:22-30

**Feast of the Baptism of Jesus:** Isaiah 42:1-7, Acts 10:34-38, Luke 3:15-22

### NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.



### EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS:

We will soon be discerning a new group of Eucharistic Ministers who would undergo training in the spring months. If you feel that the Lord is calling you to this ministry, we would be delighted to include you in that ministry here at Our Lady Chapel. Both adults and teens [must be a Senior in High School] are welcome to participate in this very special ministry. We are in need of ministers for both our Saturday evening and Sunday morning Masses. **Contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you feel called to this ministry.**



### WHAT IS LOVE?

To love, we need to be sensitive to those around us, which is impossible if we are always racing through life engrossed in all the things we need to do before sunset.

—Eknath Easwaran

**THE POWER OF POWERLESSNESS:**

There are different kinds of power and different kinds of authority — there is military power, muscle power, political power, economic power, moral power, charismatic power, and psychological power, among other things. There are different kinds of authority too — we can be bitterly forced into acquiescing to certain demands, or we can be gently persuaded into accepting them. Power and authority are not all of a kind.

Imagine four persons in a room. The first is a powerful dictator who rules a country. His word commands armies, and his shifting moods intimidate subordinates. He wields a brutal power. Next to him sits a gifted athlete at the peak of his physical prowess — a man whose quickness and strength have few equals. His skills are a graceful power for which he is much admired and envied. The third person is a rock star whose music and charisma can electrify an audience and fill a room with a soulful energy. Her face is on billboards, and she is a household name. That's still another kind of power. Finally, we have too in the room a newborn — a baby, lying in its crib, seemingly without any power or strength whatsoever, unable to even ask for what it needs. Which of these is ultimately the most powerful?

The irony is that the baby ultimately wields the greatest power. The athlete could crush it, the dictator could kill it, and the rock star could out-glow it in sheer dynamism, but the baby has a different kind of power. It can touch hearts in a way that a dictator, an athlete, or a rock star cannot. Its innocent, wordless presence, without physical strength, can transform a room and a heart in a way that guns, muscle, and charisma cannot. We watch our language and actions around a baby — less so around athletes and rock stars. The powerlessness of a baby touches us at a deeper moral place.

And this is the way we find and experience God's power here on earth — sometimes to our great frustration — and this is the way that Jesus was deemed powerful during his lifetime. The entire Gospels make this clear from beginning to end. Jesus was born as a baby — powerless — and he died hanging helplessly on a cross with bystanders mocking his powerlessness. Yet both his birth and his death manifest the kind of power upon which we can ultimately build our lives.

The Gospels describe Jesus' power and authority in exactly this way. In Greek — the original language of the Gospels — we find three words for power or authority. We easily recognize the first two — energy and dynamic. There is a power in energy — in physical health and muscle — just as there is a power in being dynamic — in dynamite, in having the power to generate energy. But when the Gospels speak of Jesus as “having great power” and as having a power beyond that of other religious figures, they do not use the words energetic or dynamic. They use a third word — *exousia*, which might be best rendered as vulnerability. Jesus' real power was rooted in a certain vulnerability — like the powerlessness of a child.

This isn't an easy concept to grasp since our idea of power is normally rooted in the opposite — namely, the notion that power lies in the ability to overwhelm, not underwhelm, others. And yet we understand this — at least somewhat, in our experience of babies, who can overpower us precisely by their powerlessness. Around a baby, as most every mother and father has learned, we not only watch our language and try not to have bitter arguments; we also try to be better, more loving persons. Metaphorically, a baby has the power to do an exorcism. It can cast out the demons of self-absorption and selfishness in us. That's why Jesus could cast out certain demons that others could not.

And that's how God's power forever lies within our world and within our lives, asking for our patience. Christ, as Annie Dillard says, is always found in our lives just as he was originally found — a helpless baby in the straw who must be picked up and nurtured into maturity. But we are forever wanting something else — namely, a God who would come and clean up the world and satisfy our thirst for justice



quite obvious in terms of this child's destiny, as well as our own human destiny. Death is a mystery we all enter into as equals, regardless of how important or significant our lives have been during our time here on earth. Death is a mystery to be lived. It not just another problem to be solved.

Mysteries lead to discovery, or more accurately to revelation. When you encounter paradox and mystery, you are close to the gospels. For quite obviously God is bigger, more powerful, and infinitely more than anything we are. Mere data, mere information cannot possibly carry the weight or bear the load of the enormity of Mystery — particularly theological mysteries. The only thing that's strong enough to bear the full weight of revelation is mystery, along with poetic and symbolic language. Science and technology collapse under the weight of all we must face, and face daily.

There is a motto that tells us: “knowledge is power.” Quite so. But wisdom is superior, deeper, and a far more profound reality than knowledge or understanding. Wisdom is found in the realms of mystery; it's the only true path to revelation.

We should not let our modern technological world and culture rob us of our innate sense of mystery. We should not let our children be deprived of having a childhood. We should not deprive ourselves of something that children can point to — namely the world of awe, reverence, and mystery. To enter into those realms, we must, as Jesus told us, become as little children.

Children, as we all know, love stories. So do we. The infancy narratives surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ are filled with wondrous stories. The legendary story of Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar — the three Wise Men — is a story that invites us to be as little children once again and with awe, reverence, and wonder to enter into the world of Mystery, there to receive God's revelation.

And so, we must ask: is this a story that we regard with distant and unemotional objectivity? Is it merely the subject of cool intellectual curiosity? Or is it a wondrous, mystical story that invites us to embark upon a quest, a journey that was there in the beginning at the birth of our Savior, and a journey or a pilgrimage that Christians have been embarked upon for 2,000 years now?

God has a Word for us; He has something He wants to say to us. God has a vision for us, a revelation to give to us. Are we willing to be a seeker and to journey with those Wise Men from the East? The wise still seek Him.

Epiphany is not a one-time event — it is a context in which we live. How, then, can we seek the Lord in these days, in these times of ours? The one necessary thing is to give God time, quiet and alone time in which to reflect and meditate. I have talked with some very busy and highly successful people who actually take time out away from their many concerns to reflect. They give their attention to God's still, inner voice deep within them. They have come to know that they are more effective if they reflect on what they are doing, reflect on their goals and how they are achieving them. A by-product found in such times is a sense of fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness. These are all things that can be done in the presence of God, all things that are ultimately directed at seeking God's purposes for our lives. They are far more important to attend to than the problems that beset us.

If Christmas is all about God coming to us to seek us out, then Epiphany is all about our seeking out the God who has come among us. The Wise Men offer us great wisdom. They give us a gift that is priceless. After finding Christ they went home by another route. We should too. With the Wise Men, may you and I make that journey. —taken from the writings of Father Charles Irvin, which appear on the internet

**TRUST YOUR VOCATION:**

You have to start trusting your unique vocation and allow it to grow deeper and stronger in you so it can blossom in your community. Look at Rembrandt and van Gogh. They trusted their vocations and did not allow anyone to lead them astray. With true Dutch stubbornness, they followed their vocations from the moment they recognized them. They didn't bend over backward to please their friends or enemies. Both ended their lives in poverty, but both left humanity with gifts that could heal the minds and hearts of many generations of people. Think of these two men and trust that you, too, have a unique vocation that is worth claiming and living out faithfully.

**UNFINISHED:**

As we celebrate this Feast of the Epiphany, we can easily think of nativity scenes which show the Magi crowded into the stable of Jesus' birth — along with the shepherds, animals, an angel, Mary, Joseph and the baby. But the Magi were almost certainly later visitors — coming perhaps as long as two years after Jesus' birth. By then, Joseph had no doubt found better lodging for his family — which is probably why Matthew says the wise men entered “the house” to find Jesus. But whatever the time and place, these Gentile visitors from the East “knelt down and paid him homage.” In older vocabulary, they “adored” him. They finished what they came to do.

But Leonardo da Vinci didn't. Over the centuries, various painters have portrayed this visit, but one of the most famous — despite its being unfinished — is da Vinci's *Adoration of the Magi*. The artist had been commissioned in 1480 to paint this 8-by-9-foot work for the main altar of the monastery of San Donato a Scopeto, near Florence. He was 29 at the time, and he worked on it for quite a while, getting the piece to its brown ink and yellow ochre groundwork stage. But then he moved to Milan and left it behind, never to work on it again. Eventually the assignment was given to another artist who provided the requested painting to the monastery in 1496. Da Vinci's unfinished work still exists and is on display in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Though uncompleted, it is recognized in the art world as one of his most important works.

Wouldn't it be great if all our unfinished projects were also considered very important in their uncompleted states? Imagine all the stuff you could let go of, saying: “It's not finished and now, it never will be, but it's got high value nonetheless.” To start with, not many of us can rival da Vinci in terms of genius and artistry. But even if we could, do we really want our contributions to the world to be in the form of stuff we started but never got around to completing?

Da Vinci himself had a reputation as being unreliable at completing commissioned works. While he would devote months to the concept and composition of the work, he had no appetite for the actual labor of carrying out the painting itself. And there may have been a problem with getting paid. Point is, for whatever reasons, da Vinci never finished the portrayal of the Magi adoring Jesus. The Magi finished their work of adoration; da Vinci didn't. How about us?



Usually, it's not that we don't plan to finish, or even that once into a project, we make a reasoned decision to let the thing go, which sometimes is the better part of wisdom. Rather, with those things we think important to finish, we still have to deal with flagging energy and/or unexpected hurdles. Sometimes it's almost as if some chaotic force is triggered when we're within sight of the finish line — something like the Allstate Insurance “mayhem” commercials which delights in sidetracking our plans. Whether it be working on a community service project, or finishing a home remodeling project, or your resolve to be more intentional about your prayer life, we have all left unfinished paintings behind.

This is not the time for guilt; but the truth is that if we want to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, that means following through on intended growth in prayer life, good deeds, missions to which we are called, and resolutions to let go of prejudices and hatreds must begin — or be resumed. It is part of the journey. It means doing the right thing long-term and following Jesus as consistently as we can in the situations of daily living.

In these things, it's not uncommon for us to make a good start — and, in some cases, even make a lot of headway toward where we think God is pointing us. Nonetheless, we shouldn't be surprised if that's when a fresh wave of problems and hindrances hits us. We shouldn't be surprised if things that

The journey itself is wonderful. For during the journey of our lives, we continually come upon new experiences of God. Sometimes we experience Him in the wonders of His Creation — in the woods, the mountains, the oceans, the lakes. Sometimes we experience Him in the wonders of His people — those who care for others, those who radiate the Kindness of the Kind One, those who are on fire with His Love. And sometimes we experience Him within ourselves — “Were not our hearts on burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?” the disciples on the road to Emmaus exclaimed they realized they were walking with Jesus [Luke 24:52]. “Were not our hearts on fire when we knelt before the Blessed Sacrament during the retreat, during the Mass, during Adoration?” many of us could add.

The goal is wonderful — whether it be a newborn King, the summit of a mountain, or the glory of heaven. But the journey itself is amazing.

We walk together with the Lord as our guide. One of us here, another one there, gasps: “I can't make it.” But we won't let them quit. And we have absolute trust that they wouldn't let us quit either, for the Christian community demands our care for each other. We need to complete the journey as the One Body of Christ. And we care for all we meet on the road of our lives. This Teen reaching out for help, that elderly man needing company, that poor man needing food, those children in Africa needing medicine, all are on the journey of life with us. The Lord places many people in our company. Caring for them is essential if we are to complete the Journey He has set for us.

May I walk with you? Will you walk with me? We need each other. We have to begin now — our guide is calling us to follow Him up the path.

In 1857, John Henry Hopkins wrote a Christmas carol for the Epiphany. Perhaps he was only writing about the magi. Or perhaps he was writing about our journey: “Star of wonder, star of night! Star of royal beauty bright; westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy Perfect Light.”

—taken from the writings for Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino, which appear on the internet.

**ATTENDANCE:**

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration Form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

**ENVELOPES:**

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

<b>Total Offerings: Saturday [12/28/24]</b>	_____	<b>\$ 60.00</b>
<b>Total Offerings: Sunday [12/29/24]</b>	_____	<b>\$ 89.00</b>
<b>Total Offerings: Tuesday [12/31/24]</b>	_____ [New Year's Eve]	<b>\$ 1,414.00</b>

**PRAYER:**

Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.

— St. Teresa of Avila



**THE JOURNEY:**

Something monumental was taking place. Pagans — magi — who studied stars and were convinced that stars told a story to human beings, saw a new star. They had never seen a new star before. Stars told them about the world. This new star was telling them that the world was being renewed. Great heroes and great people had stars or were stars; they were like constellations looking down on the rest of humanity. This new star had to belong to the greatest of people. It was looking down on anyone who would be willing to learn its message. The star was moving towards the west. So the magi set off from their lands in the East on a journey. Did any of them wonder if they would be able to complete the journey? We don't know, but we do know that they and their retinues traveled together. Perhaps they were supporting each other in their determination to complete the journey. They were convinced that the star they saw was announcing a new king who would be the King of Kings. This new King had been born somewhere in the land of the Hebrews. So they went to Herod's Court. They did not find the King there, but they did learn that the Jews once had a prophet named Micah who said that the ruler of the people would come from Bethlehem. Sure enough, the star was going in the direction of Bethlehem, leading them to the place — “the house” scripture says — where Mary, Joseph, and the baby were. When they left the Holy Family, they were pleased not just that they had found the King, but that they made the journey.

Twenty hikers gathered early in the morning at the trail head outside of Breckenridge, Colorado, waiting for the guide. On their way they had seen the top of the mountain — Mt Quandary — but now they were too close to see anything other than the trail and the forest. The hikers were between 16 and 55 — all in fairly good shape. They were from the East — New York, to be exact — and they knew very little about hiking up a 14,000-foot mountain in Colorado. So they hired a park ranger on his day off to guide them. At first, they started off with a brisk pace, full of enthusiasm; but after an hour into the hike, most of them were panting from the effort as well as the altitude. Some weren't sure they could make it to the top, but they supported each other, encouraged each other, and kept following the guide. Then they crossed the tree line and could see the bald head of the Quandary summit. More encouragement was needed for even the strongest of them, but they continued the journey to its conclusion. They stood on the peak, and could see most of the Eastern Colorado Rockies. There was Mount Evans. And when they looked carefully to the south, they saw Pike's Peak. It was beautiful. They left very happy — not just from what they saw, but for how they completed the journey. Sure, they could have paid a lot of money and hired a small plane or a helicopter to take them through the Rockies. But that wouldn't have been the same. They would never have appreciated the peaks if they had not undertaken the hike — the journey.

We are all on the journey of life. Like the magi, we have a sense of where we need to go, but we cannot see the destination. Like the hikers, we know the peak is up there somewhere, but we cannot see it.

We have a guide. It is not a star. It is not a Park Ranger. Our guide is Jesus who leads us in the direction our lives need to travel. But the journey is difficult. Sometimes we want to quit. Sometimes we are exhausted. But like the hikers in Colorado, we encourage each other, we support each other. And the Christian community — our Church community — helps us complete the journey. What is it that we will find when the journey is over? Will it be a baby? Will it be the summit of a mountain? We don't know, other than whatever we come to — it will be beautiful. You see, we are journeying with Christ to the Father. We are journeying to the One whom the philosophers called the culmination of All Truth, All Goodness, and All Beauty. We are journeying with Christ to heaven.



have never gone wrong before, go wrong. We also shouldn't be surprised if our passion for the endeavor suddenly evaporates. Life is like that.

Thus, our prayer for ongoing discipleship might be: “Help me, O God, while my enthusiasm is leaking away and my energy is failing and problems are multiplying, to continue to do your will.”

One of the signs that we are maturing in faith, however, is when we realize and accept that the Christian life is not only a matter of initial repentance and commitment, but also a matter of perseverance. As Paul told the Galatians: “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up” [Galatians 6:9]. Eugene Peterson, borrowing a phrase from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, describes the Christian life as “a long obedience in the same direction.” Peterson writes: “One aspect of the world that I have been able to identify as harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by 30-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by 30-page abridgments. There is a great market for religious experience in the world — there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.”

Simeon and Anna — the two people in the temple who recognize the presence of God in the infant Jesus — are good examples. Simeon had been “looking forward to the consolation of Israel” [Luke 2:25]. That phrase implies patient waiting. Anna, 84 years old, “never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day” [Luke 2:37]. Both signed up for the long haul and both were faithful until the end.

Likewise, the apostle Paul modeled such perseverance, writing as he drew near death: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” [2 Timothy 4:7]. His words, of course, refer to more than simply completing a mission project or seeking more holiness in living; they refer to the completion of a whole life of discipleship. But how do we attain a life of discipleship other than by completing the “faith projects” along the way? The life of faith is not a 100-yard dash — it's a marathon. It's not a tourist jaunt — it's an ongoing pilgrimage. Nonetheless, there are some shorter races that need to be run en route — such as sticking with the not-so-easy task we feel God has called us to do, such as continuing to root out our unrighteous attitudes and behaviors that impede our spiritual growth, such as continuing to work at loving our difficult neighbor as much as we love ourselves.

And so on this feast of journey — the manifestation of God into our lives, and the life of the world — where are you on your journey of faith? What do you struggle with? What is the next step? What is holding you back? And ask the Lord to journey with you...to guide you by the star which is his Son, Jesus Christ.

**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JANUARY 18<sup>th</sup>:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**



Our Savior Lutheran's Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. Please join us for a great experience.

**Please let us know in the Chapel office [440-473-3560] if you would like more information or if you would like to help.** This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

**THE MISSING MAGI:**

Moving things is risky. Whenever we start shifting things around, there is always a chance that something will be misplaced, or broken, or lost. I want to tell you a true story that took place a number of years ago. Our parish offices went through a major move. Everything had to be relocated into the new administrative wing of the parish. Records and items which had been in storage for years, were carefully repackaged and carried to their new locations. The entire move came off without a hitch — or at least that is what we thought, until Christmas came. Because as we began to unpack the pieces for our church Nativity scene, we discovered that one figure was missing. Somehow in the move, one of the Magi was either misplaced, or lost, or stolen. We searched everywhere — several times over. But despite every effort, the missing Magi was nowhere to be found. A replacement was ordered, but it would take months to arrive. The manger scene became quite a conversation piece that year — one of the magi hadn't shown up!

Now this could either be construed as a misfortune or as an opportunity. I choose to see it as an opportunity — an opportunity to ask: “What does it mean to celebrate Epiphany with only two kings? How is the absence of the third king connected with the truth of the gospel?” Here was my suggestion: an incomplete manger scene might well stand as a symbol for our lives. Because it is true that none of us finish life with all of our pieces intact. Every one of us at one time or another discovers that something we value has been misplaced, or stolen, or lost. Now this is a sadness when it concerns some material thing. But it can truly be a crisis if it is our dreams or our relationships that go awry.

All of us have expectations — expectations of what a complete life would be. We expect that we will be able to live in faithful commitment to our spouse and our close friends, but then discover that our relationships are disrupted by divorce or death. We plan that our family will be harmonious and unified, but then are forced to admit that there are resentments between us because of jealousy and hurt. We imagine that we will be productive in our work and enjoy the leisure of our retirement, but find ourselves facing unemployment or sickness. We expect to be successful and to have others hold us in high regard, yet the mistakes that we make, the addictions that trip us up, reduce the respect that others give to us and make us doubt our own self-worth.

The longer that we live, the more likely it is that something we value will go missing. The more we mature the clearer it becomes that our perfectly imagined life has not been realized. Like an incomplete manger scene, expected pieces of our lives are missing — figures we were counting on do not arrive.

When the enormity of such loss sinks in, it is important to remember what is essential to a manger scene. We have a manger scene, we have Christmas, not because there were Magi or shepherds and sheep or loving parents like Mary and Joseph. We have Christmas because a child was given to us. We have Christmas because of Christ, because he chose to become a part of our humanity and remain with us as Emmanuel, God with us. Therefore, as long as we have Christ, we have Christmas. As long as Christ is present in our lives, we have reason to believe that our lives are good, even if pieces are missing. As long as we know Christ's love then we can see that the missing parts of our lives, though important, are not essential. If Christ is with us, we can live, we can find the courage to continue.

After Mass that year, many people visited our manger scene to view the “missing king”. It spoke volumes to all of us; for the things you expected to have but do not, for the things you once had and now are lost. Then, as you sense that absence, look in the manger and see that Christ is still here. If Christ is here, then Christmas is here. If Christ is here, then two Magi are enough. If Christ is present in your life, then you have a future. Then there is hope. Then, even though pieces are missing, you still have a life to live.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appears on the internet

**LOOK FOR GOD AMONG US:**

Humanity has long been fascinated with the heavens — especially the night sky. Abraham saw the promise of untold progeny in the stars [see Genesis 12]. According to some folklorists: “Follow the Drinking Gourd” was an Underground Railroad anthem, helping escaping slaves orient themselves by the Big Dipper and North Star. Then of course we have Matthew's Gospel about the holy people lured by a star to an encounter with the child Jesus [see Matthew 2:1-12].

It's not unusual to hear people try to prove or disprove the existence of that star and the Magi's visit. That's one way of trying to deal with the truth of the Scriptures. But the very fact that the seekers were following a star hints that the mystery of this story is far richer than any factual data we might be able to produce.

Matthew's tale begins with the Magi — a name which designates the sky-gazing pilgrims as religious people who read the signs of the times via the stars. Although Matthew mentions their three gifts, he says nothing about how many participated in what could have been a whole caravan.

Following the theme of the heavens, the Magi came “from the rising of the sun” — the east. Their interpretation of the stars told them that a “king of the Jews” had been born. Unwisely, the pilgrims decided to consult the current ruler — the notorious King Herod. In a tragically ironic twist, Herod turned to local theologians to ask where a Messiah would be born. Culpably incurious about the signs of their times and what God was up to among them, the religious leaders simply reported the results of their Scripture study — Bethlehem of Judah was the designated birthplace for the ruler who would shepherd Israel.

In what sounds like a comic twist, the Magi — whose quest had already taken them more than 1,000 kilometers — heard Herod ask them to “search diligently for the child.” Of course, he did so only for malevolent purposes. But because they were God-seekers, the Magi were too attentive to signs from heaven to end up being accomplices to Herod's evil.

There is no doubt that this is a great story, and that it adds a wonderful diversity of costumes and exotic animals to our Nativity scenes. But what else are we to take from it?

Of all the evangelists, only Matthew — the one who wrote most directly for a Jewish audience — tells us about the Magi. Whereas Luke, who wrote for a broader public, highlighted the Jewish characters of the shepherds and the elders Anna and Simeon in Jesus' birth story, Matthew spotlighted foreigners, people with no awareness of the faith and promises of Abraham. Thus, Matthew reminds his readers that they are a “chosen people” so that they would become, as Isaiah said, a light to the nations. Israel's centrality in the divine plan was all about their vocation to make God known to the whole world.

The title of today's feast is the Epiphany — Revelation — of the Lord. The truly tragic irony in Matthew's story was that pilgrim pagans journeyed far from home because they believed God was doing something new, while the leaders of the chosen people read their scriptures, but no longer expected God to reveal anything new. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had worked out an uneasy but relatively peaceful accommodation with the Roman Empire. Rome allowed the clergy to function as long as they did not rock the boat; therefore, the Jewish people enjoyed some degree of freedom to practice their religion. In today's terms, they were living in something between accommodation and complicity.

The Magi, on the other hand, intuited something that awakened their dreams enough to shake them out of a settled existence. They may not have had the promises of Abraham or a sense of the God of Israel, but they did believe that life could be more than what they already knew where they were. Without knowing details, they believed in a God of revelation.

As we begin this new year, the Magi might be inviting us too to read the stars, to look for epiphanies of God among us and to allow mystery to shake us out of our status quo and beyond the borders of our comfortable relationships and thought patterns. Like the Magi, we may not know exactly what we are looking for, but if we set our sights high enough, God will not hesitate to lead us into new epiphanies where we will meet God among us in unexpected and wildly rich ways.

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appears on the internet 11