



Christmas Eve Prayer 2011



International Presentation Association 2011

For Private Circulation

LEADER

“Every year of life waxes and wanes. Every stage of life comes and goes. Every facet of life is born and then dies. Every good moment is doomed to become only a memory. Every perfect period of living slips through our fingers and disappears. Every hope dims and every possibility turns eventually to dry clay. Until Christmas comes again. Then we are called at the deepest, most subconscious, least cognizant level to begin to live again. Christmas brings us all back to the crib of life to start over again: this time, finally, we can learn what it takes to live well, grow to full stature of soul and spirit, and get it right.” (Joan Chittister)

ALL

Come Ancient Ones, gifts of God,
Come original guardians of this land,
Come Indigenous Ancestors, wise ones from of old,
first inhabitants of this place.
Give us a love for the land, you so gently cared for,
and forgive us for our sins against this hallowed land.

READER 1

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3



When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." 9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

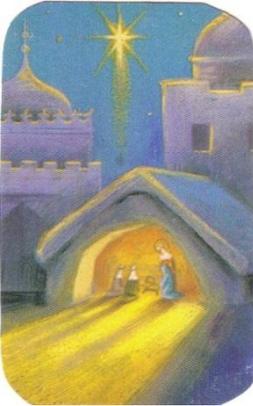
REFLECTION AND SHARING

REFLECT ON ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND, IF YOU ARE PRAYING IN A GROUP, SHARE SOME OF YOUR REFLECTIONS.

- The wise ones followed a hunch in their hearts and their astrological plottings and pursued the bright star over great distances. What are the “hunches and plottings” that have been guiding you recently in your search for the Holy One?
- Who are some of the other “starseekers” who are guiding, supporting and challenging you on your journey?

- The wise ones finally found themselves at the feet of the One they had sought – a finding of unexpected majesty in squalid surroundings. What are some of the surprises you have met on your search for the Holy One?
- What do you think was the star that guided Nano? Where did her star lead her? Where does it call us today?

READER 2



The Three Kings are an iconic part of the Christmas story... Of course, if you read Matthew, you'll find that the Epiphany story isn't about three kings, but an un-numbered collection of astrologers. Matthew is disrupting our comfortable thoughts and pastoral tranquillity so that we truly hear the gospel. These magi are not picture perfect. For the devout in Jesus' time magi were low on the religious and social ladder - along with shepherds and any other social riff raff. Magi were avoided because they were considered idolaters because of their use of astrology. Now, if the shepherds and these Eastern characters are welcome into the earliest stories of Jesus' life, then who can be left out? Like our church today, the early church had all sorts of 'characters' amongst them. Who would dare exclude a person or any group from the community if the shepherds and Magi appeared in the earliest stories of Jesus?

READER 3

“The Epiphany story is often referred to as ‘the revelation to the Gentiles,’ because those non-Jewish astrologers did come to see that important things were happening in Bethlehem. But the decisive

part of the story for us is what we might call ‘the revelation through the Gentiles.’ The secular message from the Persian astrologers shook up religion and politics in Israel. The Magi's arrival led Herod, the chief priests and the scribes to a remarkable new understanding of what was happening in their world.

READER 2

There is a parallel situation of revelation today. Pronouncements of unexpected news have shaken up the nations, and confused religions. Today, it is atmospheric physicists and environmental biologists, going about their routine, secular work, who have seen an important message in the evidence that they are paid to observe and analyze. They see global climate change and ecological collapse as present realities. And like the Magi twenty centuries ago, some of those scientists have come to the political and religious leaders to share their important news. Their revelation has been painfully slow to take root. We've heard the warnings, but not taken the bold action that is required....

READER 3

In the old story, the priests and scribes, when alerted to the message from the Magi, discovered themes and insights in scripture that they had never perceived before. So, too, some of today's biblical scholars and theologians, alerted to an environmental perspective, are rediscovering parts of the Judeo-Christian tradition that help us understand how we fit into the whole web of God's creation ...



The modern Magi have spoken clearly and persistently. Unlike the Persian astrologers, they have not gone home. The scientists continue to warn us about what

is happening to Earth's fragile ecology. We still can respond to their message with public policies and religious beliefs that are adequate to the crisis.” (Rev. Peter Sawtel).

We are called to leave behind the familiar and search for Christ in what seems the most unlikely places. Rather than frankincense we can bring advocacy for poor families, single parents, the homeless and people with disabilities or marginalised. Rather than gold, we might find ways of contributing help in some way with programmes that offer assistance to people living with HIV/AIDS. Rather than myrrh, we might check on our neighbours, visit the sick and the dying. Christ is manifested in the world's lesser places and in surprising people. The Magi show us, Christ is not found in the palaces but in the humpy, the sick bed, the street, the abused person. The living of this tenet is an epiphany. It is being God's heart in the world. *Claude Mostowik*

LEADER: LET US PRAY

We remember the light that came into our dark world. So that we may withstand the powers of darkness and walk in the light we pray

Response: May we become people of the light, and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.

READER 4

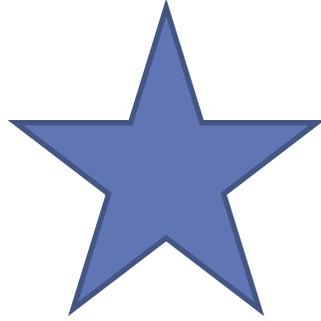
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of war, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of poverty, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of hunger, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of homelessness, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of illness, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of fear, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of hatred, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Where there is the darkness of hopelessness, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**
- ❖ Let us pray quietly for a moment for those places in our lives where we most need light ... in our families, in our work, in our care for Earth, in our suffering, in our greed, in our loneliness, in our fear of loss. In all those dark places, we pray ... **May we become people of the light and shed the light of justice, peace, and hope on the whole community of life.**

LET US PRAY:

God of different journeys, You sent your Son to be God-with-us, the Light of the World. Help us to hold fast to the stars that you send to guide us, the stars that fill our hearts with delight even as we stumble in the darkness. Like the wise ones who followed their Star to the Christmas crib, may we have the courage to take different paths when others impose limits on our peace-making and compassion for the stranger. Thank you for continuing to speak to our world even through the most unexpected sources. Thank you for all those starseekers who have discerned how the message of today's wise ones call us into a new and faithful ethic of global relationship with the entire web of life. Amen.



Creator of the Stars
God of Epiphanies
You are the Great Star
You have marked my path with light
You have filled my sky with stars
naming each star
guiding it
until it shines into my heart
awakening me to deeper seeing
new revelations
and brighter epiphanies.



O infinite Star Giver
I now ask for wisdom and courage
to follow these stars
for their names are many
and my heart is fearful.



They shine on me wherever I go:
The Star of Hope
The Star of Mercy and Compassion
The Star of Justice and Peace
The Star of Tenderness and Love
The Star of Suffering
The Star of Joy
And every time I feel the shine
I am called
to follow it
to sing it
to live it
all the way to the cross and beyond.



O Creator of the Stars
You have become within me
an unending Epiphany.

Macrina Wiederkehr



CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

Poor ones, please take the bread. It is yours.

The house with running water belongs to you.

A plot of land, a dignified job – all yours.

Forgive me for offering it.

Charity is no substitute for justice but your children are hungry now.

Spirit of Justice, break open our hearts.

Break them wide open

Let anger pour through

like strong winds

cleaning us of complacency,

Let courage pour through

like spring storms

flooding out fear.

Let zeal pour through

like blazing summer sun,

filling us with passion.



Force of Justice, grant me

anger at what is,

courage to do what must be done,

passion to break down the walls of injustice

and build a land flowing with milk and honey

for God's beloved, God's special love, God's Poor Ones.

Spirit of Justice break open our hearts.

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

We can, as groups, recapture the innocence of fearing and hoping and thinking together about everything that troubles us ... We are people who pledge to grow in our capacity to simultaneously think and feel about the state of our world without going numb, to engage in seeking solutions with the joy of a young child feeding ducks by a pond, to absorb the pain of one another's ignorance and yearning and to shift from hopelessness to possibility as our ground of being.

Vicki Robin

