

Happy New Year my friends! 2022 Can we top the last two years?!

Time to take stock of the old year and move forward into the new...a point in time where we look at how we have grown...or not! I know I've grown some and am definitely more well-rounded...especially around the middle!

So how many of you make resolutions...and how many have broken them already? Perhaps it's a little too soon to ask...let's give it a week or two.

All the prep, all the hustle and bustle is over, now comes the bills and returns... In the church calendar the annual observance of the birth of Jesus is almost over.

But the New Year reminds us that nothing is truly over...in fact it's just beginning. It's a point in time where we reflect how far we've come, and a time to take stock of where we are headed. It's a time to get our bearings and then move forward!

Today we celebrate the Epiphany...Recalling the visit of the Wise Men with their gifts of gold (for kingship), frankincense (for priesthood) and myrrh (for death).

And sometimes the celebration of the New Year doesn't do justice to the fact that real change in our lives is more likely a slow process - a journey if you will. And like the wise men to truly have change and transformation one must be willing to travel into unknown territory as well as willing to go home by another way.

For us to truly change...something in our lives has to change...Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results...In order for us to change we must take a different road don't we.

Now many legends have grown up around the story of these Wise men or Kings." Matthew calls them "Wise men from the East" ...  
MAGI .

They were probably astrologers ... which would explain why they would have noticed finding an unusual or special star in the sky.

The gospel doesn't even say there were three of them...The idea of three kings came from the three gifts that were given - one king for each gift... Some Bible Scholars have suggested that there were actually Four Kings, but the fourth one brought fruit cake and so was immediately dropped from the story.

What is important is that what these men saw intrigued and excited them so much that they would leave the comforts of their own homes to follow where this star led into unknown territory.

They probably lived in Persia, or Arabia. These guys were not Jews. They never prayed to this God nor did they ever read the Hebrew Bible.

These Magi met God in the midst of their normal day-to-day life... they were at work.... when God just showed up!

God is not limited to meeting us in a certain place ...or at a certain time...God can speak to us Anywhere ... Anytime...and to Anyone.

...and these men were open to what they experienced... as opposed to Herod's religious scholars who had everything right there in front of them the whole time but were not open to seeing God entering into the world literally right under their noses...if you stand in the Herodian you can see Bethlehem.

The Hebrew scripture experts had the scrolls and when they do get a hint of the Messiah coming into the world instead of love and acceptance this event is met with fear and trepidation.

For those in power would now have to give up there worldly life and comforts in order to follow God...so how does the King of Israel welcome the new Messiah...by murdering children in order to protect and maintain his lifestyle!

Now the Magi don't head straight to Bethlehem, they first head to the Palace. I mean wouldn't you expect a King to be born in a palace. And when He's not there they ask Herod for directions.

Which is why someone suggested that this is why these magi are so famous... They are the only men in recorded history known to stop and to ask for directions.

And although Herod wears all the trappings of a King we see that God does not value such things! Jesus the king is coming to the unexpected in unsuspecting ways - That seems to be God's M.O! It's quite different from how we see power isn't it...

It seems upside down to us...Jesus wasn't born in a palace. Shepherds and fisherman stood in his courts, his standard was a cross (a symbol of humiliation and torture), he did not come with a iron fist but the open hands of a servant. He showed not dominance but love! Little wonder that when Christ enters the world...the powers to be become "troubled" ...All who cling to power, all who lust for status and dominance, are in for a tumble before this child!

Jesus doesn't come to make our lives more comfortable, Jesus doesn't help us fit in and succeed...it's just the contrary! Once we see the way of God we start to notice false gods all over the place. We see royal pretenders for who they are. Nothing is the same.

Something in us changes!

This doesn't come easy and certainly doesn't make our lives easier...when we finally discover Jesus... it's usually just the opposite. A strange unfamiliar road is now our path - but this road leads somewhere forward by another way home!

There's a lot to learn from this story—something about following the light of this star.

First, you have to see the star. This requires keeping your eyes and your heart open... Then, there is a movement away from the familiar towards the light...to travel on an unfamiliar road... into unknown territory...and we may have to stop along the way and seek advice and directions...but don't get sidetracked... keep your eyes on the light...and while journeying never confuse the star itself for THAT which it points to...

And when you do come to what you think is the end of your journey...once you arrive and meet Jesus...well...that's really only the beginning isn't it...you won't see the world the same way again...surrendering to this newborn king means you will be forever transformed and changed. So what then?

Let's talk a little about light...because once we find Jesus you are then asked to point others towards Christ...to live your life in such a way as to be a star for others to follow...

See First we follow the light...And then once we find what we seek... we then, in turn, become a light for others to follow. Now WE, through our lives, point to Jesus.

Let there be light... it was the first thing God created...a symbol for seeing clearly - truth and goodness – a symbol of God coming to us in a world of darkness.

I am the light of the world says Jesus...and as he teaches His disciples and He tells them later that you are to be the light of the world.

The star...enters the darkness so that the first to see that light were those dwelling in the shadows of power - the outsiders...those at the margins of society - the shepherds.

But today we have these wise men noticing this special light in the heavens...and they too are open... these people are not marginalized and DO have power in the world - but they seem to know that there is something bigger than themselves - they are searching for that same light to show them the way.

Here at Holy Family we may have to look to our neighbors to associate with the shepherds – the marginalized...but many of us here can certainly relate to these wise men.

They were well educated people, good at their jobs, having status and some power and standing in the world...but through knowledge and wisdom, these people came to know that there was more to life...that there IS something greater than ourselves.

And the star - the pointer, leads them to the light of the world...a baby who would bring light to those in darkness...and as the child becomes a man Jesus tells those who would follow Him, that they themselves must be **LIGHT IN THE WORLD...**

This morning we see the light of the star pointing towards Jesus ...and if we follow Jesus we will not walk in darkness but have the light of life...but this is only the beginning!

The story of Christmas – it doesn't end with these wise men...it begins! The ability for this star to continue shining is now left to you and me.

We are now asked by Jesus to become a beacon of light on a hill, mirroring God's light...shining brightly and present in the world.

Interestingly enough NASA reported that during Christmas, the lights from people's houses cause the earth to shine 50% more brightly from space...so we are literally shining the light of Christmas for even the universe to behold!

In a world where darkness seems all around us sometimes...we must sparkle with the hope, love and the peace of God's grace.

And Light is a good acronym for actually finding and following Christ:

L - Love God and Love one another

I - Imitate Jesus by striving to follow his word and example – that's Discipleship

G - Grace – Receive and Give grace in the world for one another

H - Holy - meaning to be set apart, acting as child of God

T - Tell others your story and our story - spread the good news of Christ to all.

Put your light on a stand to let it shine so that others may know PEACE, HOPE, and LOVE...It's time for us to shine... for we are all called to be the light in the world... a star for others to follow.

And just as a lighthouse uses it's light to guide ships towards safety and away from danger... so too are we called to guide the lost away from the dangers of the world and guide them safely into the embrace of our loving God.

Now some of us are still on that road... following that star...and others of us have discovered the king and now are being asked to be a light for others to follow.

Jesus said "I am the light of the world" ...and now my friends YOU are the light in the world...a shining star to excite and transform the world by pointing those in darkness to our newborn King.

May you come to find Christ made forever new in your hearts this new year.

...and may you be the light of Christ for others in the world - this Christmas... this New Year... and always!

Amen