Epiphany 2020
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Matthew 2:1-12

Good morning and Happy Epiphany,
or as my family called it “Happy Little Christmas”

The reading that we just heard from Matthew’s gospel
involves mysterious characters puzzling responses to situations.

The Magi
those exotic
non Jewish characters
from the East
saw a star at its rising.
These life long searchers took huge risks to follow that luminary.
They had no idea about who or what they would encounter along the way.
They had no idea about who or what they would find at the end.
Following that star meant they could only travel in the dark
both figuratively and literally.
Yet, these foreigners allowed themselves to be open to the unexpected.

When Herod asked
about the One the Magi sought
the chief priests and teachers
knew right away that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem.
They had been preparing all of their lives for the Messiah to come,
and here he was.

Wouldn’t you think that at least one of them
would have asked the Magi if they could go with them
to find the Messiah?
But not one of them did.
They didn’t allow themselves to be open to the unexpected.

The distance from Jerusalem to Bethlehem was a short 5 1/2 miles.
Bethlehem was a small town.

They knew that the child would be less than 2 years of age.
Scripture scholars tell us that there would only be 20-30 boys
under the age of 2 at the time.
He would not have been hard to find,
but none of them looked.

None of them allowed themselves to be open to the unexpected.

Our Provident God communicates with us all the time.
But if we don’t allow ourselves to be open to the unexpected we will miss God’s self revelation. We will miss Providence.

The Magi set out to see royalty and unexpectedly found themselves kneeling before a baby born of indigent parents in an out of the way place.

Their hopes and dreams were realized in the most unexpected way. They were transformed by the experience. The text describes their transformation by saying they returned home by a different route.

Today we will participate in an annual Epiphany tradition. We will bless this house, our home. The initials C+M+B along with the current year are chalked on the doorway.

The initials have a twofold meaning. They stand for the traditional names attributed to the Three Magi—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar—but they also stand for the Latin phrase, “Christus mansionem benedicat,” which means “Christ bless this house.”

Our homes are places of comfort and we hope that all who come through the doors of this home will always find a warm welcome.

But Pope Francis has continually challenged us beyond the comforts of home. He calls us to move to the periphery—to have the courage of the Magi and step out of our comfort zones to visit, to be present, and to accompany and provide for those in need.

One of the ways we’ve tried to respond to the Pope’s call throughout the Advent season was the collection of items for the homeless. This weekend those items were packaged in a kind of blessing bag.

At the end of this liturgy when we bless the house
we will be invited to take the blest chalk
to mark and bless our own comfortable dwellings,
but also to take a number of the blessing bags
to share with those in need that we might meet along the way.

Like the Magi,
like the priests and the teachers
we have a choice to allow ourselves to be open to the unexpected.
We have a choice to step out of our comfort zones and go to the periphery.

We have a choice to remain the same
or to open our hearts,
to open our eyes to see the light of Christ in others,
to walk with those who are searching,
to make a home for those who are in need.
Will we risk opening ourselves to the unexpected?

The Magi laid their gifts before the Child.
Better than the gifts they gave
we’re those they took away.