

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.”

Our Gospel reading today tells us the story of the Wise Men traveling to pay homage to the Messiah. The Wise Men were gentiles sometimes called astrologers and even Kings. And from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in a chronicle known as the Excerpta Latina barbari, identifies them as, Balthasar, king of Arabia, Melchior, king of Persia and Gasper, king of India. Gentiles as well as Jews came to Bethlehem to worship the Christ Child. Paul tells us in the Epistle: “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.” As tradition tells us, the Wise Men brought gifts of gold, symbolizing virtue, frankincense, symbolizing prayer, and myrrh symbolizing suffering.

Just as the Wise Men were on a journey to find the Christ Child, the Messiah, so are we on that same journey. Have you ever thought of your life as a spiritual journey? I always found it interesting to take an afternoon and plot the major events in my life: the highs and the lows, the jobs I had taken or not taken, different choices I had made, places I have lived. It was always an interesting exercise. Many choices in our lives take much thought, other choices seem almost random. It is always interesting to see the overall direction that my life has taken. It was not until my sister, Susan, faced her dying that my life by intention or through God’s grace I seriously began that search for Jesus.

Susie had moved to Maryland with her family. She was 34 and had two young children. She suddenly found herself in the hospital being told those awful words, “I’m sorry, there’s nothing more we can do.” My Mother was the saint in our family. She prayed before meals. Read and studied scripture every morning. Prayed before she went to bed. She would go on retreats and read spiritual books. She was always very involved in her church and helped the needy in our community. Her faith was a way of life. Jesus was her rock. But when my sister died, my mother’s faith was shaken. She said to me, “I have been praying and praying. I guess he just isn’t listening.”

When life is going well, we humans tend to become complacent. We feel we have everything under control. I’ve been there, patting myself on the back at my good fortune. God is not a pushy God. God quietly waits for our invitation. God waits patiently for us.

At a Benedictine retreat, one of the leaders, Abbot Andrew of St. Gregory’s Abbey, was talking about taking time throughout the day to pray. 10 min. here, 10 min. there. One of the retreatants raised his hand and said, “Abbot, I own my own business. I am important for keeping things running smoothly, I can’t afford to take 10 min. away from work to pray.” The Abbot thought about it for a while and then said, “If you are as important as you say you are, you can’t afford not to.” Prayer is our way of acknowledging God. God already knows we need help.

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I imagine the Wise Men's journey was not always smooth and after their encounter with Herod, they knew they needed to go home a different direction. Our spiritual journey, our lives, are not always going to be smooth. My mother kept her eyes on Christ every day of her life. Without her faith and hope, it could have been so much worse for all of us when my sister died. My mother's journey was very intentional and yet, still very rocky.

Jesus, the Messiah, the Light of the World is our rock, our sure foundation. Inviting Jesus into our lives each and every day gives us the strength and courage to continue our spiritual journey no matter what happens in life. One of the Brothers at St. Gregory, said to me once, when it seemed there were too many things going wrong in my life, "Remember, God writes straight with crooked lines." Or the time I admitted to the monks that I couldn't find the words or the strength to pray, "Don't worry, we are praying for you." The Wise Men did not take the journey alone and so we in our community are not alone. When it is too hard to pray, we pray for one another. When it seems, life is all over the place, we remind each other that God indeed writes straight with crooked lines.

A short aside. When you visit the Nativity Church in Bethlehem the door to enter the church is only 4 ft. high, it is called the door of humility. It requires adults to make a profound bow to enter. When the Wise Men found the Christ Child, they kneeled in reverence. Whether we fall to our knees in respect and reverence or whether we are brought to our knees from events in our life, I suspect the best way to find the Christ Child is through the door of humility.

The journey to Bethlehem is full of mystery. Our lives are full of mystery. Let us continue opening the ears of our heart as we continue in this human experience of life allowing the God who loves us to point us in the right direction home.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

Amen