

The Feast Of The Epiphany

January 6, 2019

The season of Epiphany, and its message and significance to our universal spiritual journey, is too often diminished between the two more elevated seasons of Christmas and Lent. But if you think about it, the message of Epiphany is HUGE; it is the emerging light and life of the divine amidst the creation. If Christmas is the birth of Jesus, the Christ, and Lent is the end of life challenge and suffering of Jesus, the Christ, then what is Epiphany, but the very life and teaching and emergence of Jesus, the Christ?

Epiphany begins with the long journey and visitation of wise men from the east to pay homage to the recently born King of Israel. So let's start there. Woven into our sacred story, from the beginning, is this idea of a unity of thought and connection between peoples of all nations and faiths. These pilgrims from another culture and religious tradition recognizing the gifts God has given the world through the people and faith of Israel.

I admire the sense of adventure and broad inclusion these wise pilgrims demonstrated through the journey to Bethlehem. Here we are, two thousand years later, and we still suffer the lack of this kind of mutual appreciation and respect of cultures and traditions other than our own. We worry about the rising influences in our culture that extend beyond our own ethnicity and religion. It is big news that for the first time in 242 years of the congress, the dress code that prohibited hats or headwear must be altered to allow newly elected Muslim congress woman, Ilan Omar, to wear her hijab in the halls of congress.

Most of us, myself included, have lived in a predominant culture that pronounced certain values and beliefs as the only perspectives and traditions that were correct. Christianity was not simply our faith, it was the only faith, and all others, were inferior, or even worse, dangerous and to be avoided if not eradicated from our culture. I find this pervasive microview of the naturally diverse and varied creation we live to be both troubling and sad. For too much of my life I have felt uncomfortable with recognizing and even exploring the gifts and wisdom and divinely inspired scriptures from faiths and traditions other than my own. For too much of my life I have felt that Christianity and the culture in which I was born and raised was all I needed. How narrow of me. How I have limited myself from the riches and wisdom that those other than my own, could bring to my life and my world.

But right in the heart of our own sacred story are wise men from the east, utilizing spiritual practices and traditions and wisdom of their own, to travel great distance and effort to pay homage to a King of a people not their own, given by a God they do not follow, to be enriched and enlightened by his very presence and all that it might mean.

I admit, this is a rather unconventional presentation that I am sharing this morning. It is more "orthodox" to present this visitation from the magi as a recognition that this Christ

of the Jews was truly the Christ and Savior of the whole world, of all peoples and all traditions, and ultimately (if things are to go the way God intends them), all faiths, traditions, cultures will be brought to this true light and manifestation of God through this young boy, born amongst the Hebrew people.

But I think the perspective I am presenting holds a relevant and timely epiphany. It is actually a good thing, a wise thing, a godly thing, to go beyond your own familiar culture and tradition. It is a good thing to recognize the divine blessings other faiths and traditions bring to our world. Sacred stories and symbols other than our own bring great enrichment to our shared lives. Here is something even more provocative: I think this political and cultural crusade to keep America "Christian" is an example of very un-christlike behavior and ideals. The gifts of the Muslim tradition, the Jewish tradition, the pre-Christianized indigenous and folk traditions, the humanist traditions, bear rich and blessed gifts to our own tradition. This idea is promoted in our own baptismal vows that we will re-commit to together next week: Will you seek and serve Christ in ALL persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? AND will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The world is rich, the universe unfathomable, and creation is beautiful because of the infinite and diverse gifts and blessings and sacraments offered in all their variation and sources. The gifts of the wise men from the east may not simply be frankincense, gold, and myrrh. The gift they offer, and it is much needed in today's rising influences of separatism and culture wars, is the gift of paying homage to the divine gifts and presence provided to our world by peoples, faiths, and cultures other than our own.

Follow their example by taking the trouble and journey to explore and understand others, or at the very least, recognize the dignity of their existence, and return back to your own culture and faith, more blessed and enlightened than had you never bothered to leave or explore.

Amen