

**Sister Antoinette Gutzler  
Reflections on the Scriptures  
Congregational Leadership Team Installation Mass  
Sunday, January 4, 2015**

**Celebrant: Father Ray Finch, Superior General, Maryknoll Society of Apostolic Life (Fathers & Brothers)**

*Scripture Passages:  
Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12*

Good morning to you all on this wonder-filled Feast of Epiphany.

Today we give thanks for Janice, Becky, Ann and Bitrina who have led us in leadership for the past six years. And we celebrate a new moment in our history, . . . . our new leadership team.

The readings we have just heard lead us into a wondrous feast. As Isaiah proclaimed, “Rise in splendor, Jerusalem. Your light has come! You will be radiant at what you see. Your heart shall throb and overflow.”

Paul witnessed to being a steward of God’s grace and Matthew, Matthew told of the journey of those who followed the Star into the unknown.

We now gather at this table to break open the Word of God and to share the Bread of Life.

We know the story of the Magi quite well. But I’d like to suggest that it is not merely a heart-warming story about following the Star. Rather, it is about the courage and the consequences that come from that following.

As I reflected on today’s liturgy, it occurred to me that the Magi’s journey parallels our Maryknoll Sisters’ foundational journey with our Three Wise Women: Mary Louise Wholean, Sarah Sullivan, and Mary Dwyer – who came to Maryknoll on Epiphany Day in 1912.

Our General Assembly’s theme, to “Embrace the Dawn, Navigate the Shifts,” continues the story of those who dared to embrace the dawn of a new day and navigate the shifts in their understandings of who and what the Star is bringing them to.

The Star first leads the Magi to the Holy City of Jerusalem, the seat of power and authority of that part of the Roman Empire. Matthew tells us that Herod and all of Jerusalem were greatly troubled at the news of the newborn King of the Jews. They have no idea where to find Him, nor are they interested in joining the search. Jerusalem may be a holy city, but the hearts of those who cower are greatly disturbed and closed to the dawn of good news to the poor. So, the Magi leave, and when the Star stops and hovers over a poor dwelling, they enter and find the Child. Their entry into this dwelling shifted their understanding from where they thought they would first find the Child, that is, in Jerusalem, to where they really found Him, in the arms of a poor peasant woman.

A new dawn arises. God emerges from the midst of the poor. From the body of a poor woman, Mary, who birthed God with us. And the words of Isaiah come to mind: “You shall be radiant at what you see. Your heart shall throb and overflow.”

After finding the Child and offering their gifts, they sleep. And in that sleep, a dream warns them not to return to Herod but to go back to their homeland by another way. It is the same homeland from which they departed but now they are very different people. Through their journey experience, they became stewards of God’s grace, people who have experienced “God with us” and have been changed by that experience. Now, instead of following a Star through the darkness of the night, they had to embrace the dawn of a new beginning and navigate a shift, first of their path home, not through Jerusalem, and secondly, for where one looks for God, not in a comfortable place of privilege, but in the margins of society, in a world that has no room for Him, we find God in the dwellings of those who are poor and marginalized.

The Star that hovered over the stable in Bethlehem is the same Star that drew Mollie Rogers, our beloved Mother Mary Joseph, into her religious experience at Smith College. When she was drawn to the excitement of the Protestant girls who had just signed the student pledge to go to China. As she prayed in the church across the street, she measured her faith and her expression of it by the sight she had just witnessed, and she began to embrace the dawn of this new desire taking root in her heart, the desire for Catholic women to also be a part of the missionary endeavor of the Church.

The Star that captivated our first women to Maryknoll is the same Star that we hold close to our hearts as we embrace the dawn of this new moment and navigate the journey of mission today, for we too are stewards of God’s voice.

Our General Assembly affirmation and our preferential option for the poor and our solidarity with invisible, dispossessed and indigenous peoples unites us with that first “after Christmas” experience. That experience told of the martyrdom of Stephen, the slaughter of innocents, and what is needed for a family wishing to be holy. Through these events, far removed from us in time, and yet very present to us in our world today and in our personal experiences, we have come to know the joy and also the cost of following the Star.

Today in this Feast we see people, not very different from us, setting out on an adventurous and courageous journey into God. Just as Christmas heralds that the deepest longing of our human hearts has drawn near to us, so Epiphany heralds the journey to that longing. Epiphany draws out the whispering secret of what the human heart has always known, that it is not the desire for riches or power or prestige or accomplishment but the desire for God, for the Holy One, for Love, that resides at the heart of who we really are.

We are on a pilgrimage, a pilgrimage together with all the innocents, all the holy ones, all creation – the earth, the nations, the shepherds, the kings, the .. dreamers who are all a part of the body of God. Epiphany takes this adventurous journey of the heart to God very seriously. Wise ones, both then and now, listen to their dreams and do not hesitate to take another uncharted route to God.

In closing, a Christmas card from the Reno Carmel brings this message to our Epiphany Feast: “And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied: ‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’”

For each of us here, this message is a call on this Epiphany Day to embrace the dawn of this new year and to navigate the shifts in each of our lives. Then, we will be radiant at what we see and our hearts will throb and overflow with joy.