

“The Party of Epiphany”

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Westby UMC

We are celebrating this liturgical festival in which we meet the children with the hope of receiving gifts brought by those characters known as the Three Wise Men. All of us by looking at gifts for children have forgotten the meaning of this celebration and everything has been diverted, staying only in the material of the gifts.

Originally this commemoration had a very different meaning and that is why we have to start with the meaning of the word epiphany which means “manifestation”. The liturgy then refers to the manifestation of the Lord to all peoples. So let's look at the historical context. The text of Matthew is written around the year 80 after Christ. Events have happened in the life and history of the people of Israel that are the basis of this party. Since Paul's preaching, which is addressed to Israelites who live outside of Jerusalem and people of Greek origin who, without anything to do with the customs and traditions of the people of Israel, have accepted faith in Jesus Christ.

Not even a hundred years have passed since the Christian era and faith in Jesus Christ has already spread beyond the borders of Israel. We then think that if this had not happened, faith in Jesus Christ would have remained within the customs and traditions of a single people, that of Israel.

But fortunately for us, it happened and that is why now people of all nations, customs and traditions have access to Jesus Christ. The author of the Gospel of Matthew then tells us a narration that we hear in today's gospel, in which we find a literary form of denominations related to traditional events of the past, presenting characters that we know as "magicians or wise men from the East." They are a representation of all the peoples with different customs and traditions that have already received this faith in Jesus Christ.

The story of Moses has been written in which reference is made to a "star" that announces to Pharaoh the birth of a liberator of the people of Israel. Pharaoh then proceeds to carry out the death of all children under the age of two trying to prevent that birth. Moses escapes this persecution by becoming the liberator of the people. When writing his gospel, Matthew uses this image and also introduces us to a "star" that announces the birth of the new savior of the People. And the announcement is given to all the peoples of the earth represented by the magicians who are guided by the star to the place where Jesus who has just been born is found.

The star is then another literary image in this narration that aims to enhance the importance of the birth of the Savior who is no longer the savior of a single people but of all the peoples of the earth. Think of those times when you as a person went through problems that seem to have no solution. When we are like this, it is as if we were in the dark, in darkness. And it is at night when the stars shine and give us their light. The star is then the symbol of light that allows us not to lose our way. The first reading from the prophet Isaiah mentions this: "Arise and shine, for your light has come...while darkness covered the earth and the peoples were at night, Yahweh rose upon you" (Isaiah 60: 1-2).

Once again we see how the author of the Gospel of Matthew, by telling us that a star has guided these characters from the East, is making us see that the peoples of the earth no longer walk in darkness, that by receiving faith in Jesus Christ we are in the light that dissolve our darkness. "Where is the King of the Jews?" the wise men from the East ask, "because we have seen his star and have come to adore him." Currently discovering the wisdom of Jesus' message becomes like an internal light that helps us get out of our problems and guides us on new paths. This is our inner star that guides us and makes us grow. "The wizards rejoiced to see the star stop at the place where the child was found." The encounter with the one who is the light of our lives will always be framed by joy.

The mystery of the Savior's presence among us, in that little child, in one like us, is the human encounter that gives us hope and fills us with joy. When Mateo tells us that the encounter with the savior occurs in that little child, it is to tell us about something that is very difficult for us to accept. The presence of God is reflected in the human, in the daily, in the small, in the normal and natural; this is what it means that magi meet the Savior in one like us, in the ordinary. Many of us think that God has to manifest himself in the extraordinary and magical and it is not so. The presence of the divine is found in the ordinary of our human nature and this is a reason for great joy.

Finally, in Matthew's narration we hear that these characters brought gifts with which they paid homage to the Savior manifested in that child. The narrative tells us that they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh just to signify that they bring the best gifts valued by their culture and tradition. This is what has become the gifts that children receive. But let's pay a little attention. For us instead of receiving it is about giving. The encounter with the divine wrapped in our humanity will demand our best gifts from us. The constant encounter with the Savior throughout our lives and our history will be in constant relationship with offering the best of ourselves, our best qualities, our best gifts. For it is by offering what we are when we are recognizing the unfinished gift of the divine in our humanity that continues to invite us to develop all that we are. It is by giving when we receive, it is by offering ourselves that we find the path and the meaning of who we are in life. And this is where we have to reflect if our darkness comes because we have stopped giving and we have become selfish, waiting only to receive. The whole mystery of the encounter with God in our humanity is an invitation to be the best person we can be, to always give more and constantly start over.

Let us celebrate this feast of the Epiphany, manifestation of God to all peoples, and little by little let us change that external joy of gifts into the internal joy of the encounter with the divine in the smallest, most human, ordinary and normal thing that invites us to give more of ourselves. This joy that becomes our radiant light that guides us like a star.

