

EPIPHANY-2019

I recently came across an article that begins like this: “We are all familiar with a herd of cows, a flock of chickens, a school of fish and a gaggle of geese. However, less widely known is a pride of lions, a murder of crows, an exaltation of doves and, presumably because they look so wise, a parliament of owls. “Now consider a group of baboons,” the author continues. “They are noisy, aggressive, and can sometimes be vicious. And what is the proper collective noun for a group of baboons? Believe it or not, the author says, it is called a Congress! That sounded a little far out. Checking it out, I found out that a group of baboons is called a troop. No offense to either group.

During these past weeks we have heard how God announced the birth of his Son to the Jewish people through the prophets. When the right time came he announced the birth to Mary, Joseph, Zachariah and Elizabeth. Eventually, when the event occurred God spoke to the shepherds through the angels. God speaks to his people in the way that they can understand. The birth of the Messiah was for everyone, and so God had to communicate this in different ways. The Gospel narrative of the Magi gives us some insight into this. The Wise Men were basically astronomers and astrologists (not so much in the sense today of astrology and horoscopes). They believe that every special event was marked by some kind of sign in the heavens. Why not? It's not that far fetched. If God can create the world from nothing; if God can send us his Son in the way he did, what is so outlandish about putting some sign in the sky, especially if this event is meant to have meaning for and be for all people.

Again, God speaks to all people, not just Christians and Jews. All people who are sincere and listening can hear God. In that way the Magi got the message. It tells us that they were looking; they were vigilant; they were constantly watching. Perhaps they felt a hunger or a longing or an emptiness or a need for fulfillment; perhaps something was missing from their lives. Perhaps it was for these reasons that they were looking. And perhaps that hunger, longing, emptiness, loneliness or need for something more, perhaps that was the voice of God speaking to them, telling them to watch for the great moment. And they were watching and in their perseverance they saw what they were waiting and watching for.

This was the first step in their journey in making their dream come true. God presented the sign--now they had to get up, leave behind home, their comfort, their past and even perhaps their religion. They had to begin the journey, unsure of where they would end up. We don't know how

long they traveled or many of the difficulties they encountered along the way, but we do know they persevered and came to the end of their journey which was really the beginning of a new one. We can only imagine what the encounter was like. Perhaps clumsily all they could do was to give the gifts they had with them. Eventually though, they found out that what the new King wanted was the gift of their hearts. Or rather, they came to realize that the new King had a gift, a real treasure for them. It was the gift of his Father's love; the gift of the infinite and unchanging love of God which the heavens speak of every day. This God of the universe cares for all people; every individual. They received this gift from the new King.

These Wise Men, were entrusted with this treasure. They were called now to protect this gift and to bring it to others. The worldly, the proud, the rich, the Herod's would not be able to accept the gift--they would only try to destroy it. And so, the Magi came intending to give gifts to the new King, but instead went away with a gift beyond their imagining.

In this season of Christmas let us remember that the gift is for us too; for all of us--you and me. Each one of us, to a more or less degree, has a hunger, a longing, a loneliness, a little emptiness, a need for something more. We can look at this in two ways: as something that's missing from our lives or, what I believe is more correct and much more positive, is that it is God speaking to us. God truly does speak to us in our hearts. His voice says look for the star; look for where Jesus is; go to him; leave those places and things that hold you back; you too begin the journey. Don't worry about a gift for Jesus; you are gift enough; you have the gift that he wants--your heart. More importantly, be open to the gift that he has for you. It is a gift beyond your desires.

Our own personal journey, our journeys as families and Faith Community is a constant journey, demanding continual perseverance and faithfulness. Sometimes it gets cloudy and we might not be able to see clearly; sometimes we can get off track. However, even though it might be cloudy and can't see the stars at night, they are still there. We remember that God is always with us to lead and guide us safely to our goal. We too, like the Magi are called to protect and safeguard the gift we receive; we too, must bring it to others so that they will be able to share in the wonderful gift that we have received.