

Epiphany Reflection
Sunday, January 3, 2016
by Sr. Theresa Langfield

“Rise up in Splendor...Your light has come, the glory of God shine upon you”

Happy New Year! On this joyful Sunday we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany and we honor our Wheaton Franciscan Covenant Companions, as you renew your Covenant Agreements today. Like the Magi, you were called and you have followed your star as faithful companions on your journey with the Wheaton Franciscans all towards union with Christ.

We are all called in the first reading to “Rise up in splendor. Our light has come and the glory of the Lord shines around us”. Rise up on behalf of justice, Wheaton Franciscans and all who worships with us, Rise up for humane treatment of immigrants DuPage County and all of Illinois. Rise up against trafficking people of the United States. Rise up for care of Mother Earth all peoples of the planet. “...the Lord shines and over you appears his glory. We are light in the darkness. Nations shall walk by OUR light, by OUR shining radiance. Look around you right here and find light in what you see. Here in this place, on this sacred ground, on this day, light shines in the darkness.

The readings acknowledge the darkness all around us, yet they hold blessing, hope and challenge. It often feels like darkness covers our earth and thick clouds cover the peoples - terrorism, war, violence against vulnerable children and adults, unspeakable atrocities, disregard for and destruction of mother earth and unwillingness on so many levels to listen, to care and work out differences. Much of this darkness was pervasive when the scriptures were written and in the time of Christ’s birth. In fact when Jesus was born, people were living as if the end of the world was imminent. Into that darkness Christ, the light, the son of God came as a human person, to all us to love, justice and compassion.

Some folks feel fearful and helpless as they witness so much violence, loss and suffering. They think they can do nothing so they stay frozen in place. Rather than get involved, they hope and pray that someone will find a way overcome and banish the darkness. Sustained fear can generate a need to blame, to scapegoat. Outrageous prejudices arise against whole nations of perceived enemies.

It becomes more difficult to bless everyone – with no exceptions. We can forget that each nation, each religious entity, is made up of individuals, all our brothers and sisters, all made in the image and likeness of God. Each of them and each of us is responsible for choosing light or darkness. Some sagely say, “What is God trying to tell us?” God is always telling us that His

love is unconditional and always present. When faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles our foundress, Mother Clara Pfaender reminded her companion and us that God is still in his heaven and will bring light into the darkness. The light of God's love is always all around us. We need only let it in.

I was recently struck by this thoughtful poem by Leonard Cohen:

"Ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering

There's a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in"

In some cultures a broken plate, bowl or vase will be lovingly repaired and embellished with gold at the broken places – honoring the imperfection as an integral part of living – a crack that lets the light in. "...the repaired bowl is cherished with a new sense of its vitality and resilience – more beautiful for having been broken. The true life of the bowl began when it was broken. The proof of its fragility and its reliance enhances its beauty.

So it is with us. We might resolve to honor and support brokenness of all sorts that we experience in ourselves and in those we encounter. If someone tells me that I am "cracked", I might consider it a compliment, an opportunity! During this New Year we might acknowledge, even to embrace our many cracks and the brokenness of others as much more than unfortunate flaws. All are opportunities for letting light in. All are blessing as vulnerability (cracks) may allow us to grow and to be flooded anew with God's light and love.

In the second reading, excerpted from the [The Way and Life of Covenant Companions](#) we celebrate a special call (might we call it an Epiphany?) by Covenant Companions to follow their stars as members of the Wheaton Franciscan community, follow in the footsteps of Francis and Clare of Assisi, in life-giving union with each other. With the Wheaton Franciscans, Covenant companions are called to be Light – to BE peace, transformation, hope and healing in our troubled world. The Gospel is the heart of their lives. Each Covenant Companion, and each Wheaton Franciscan, will relate a different story of how the call was manifested to them - a call to commit and to recommit to this way of life – all matters of the heart. A group of about 16 Sisters and Covenant Companions devoted a year of study and discernment about the special call of Covenant Companionship. The result is a refreshed understanding of the depth and breadth of Covenant Companionship. On this day of renewal we bless each one and affirm that each one's path is guided by the light of Christ.

From all appearance the Magi (probably Kings or other royalty) around whom many legends have grown, studied the stars, were prompted from within and consulted and encouraged each other to faithfully follow the guidance of the star in order to find an infant King of a remote county. They found Jesus and knelt to pay him homage, while asking for nothing. How different they were from King Herod, who, with a dark, ulterior motive, helped to guide the Magi. Feeling threatened by this royal infant, Herod did all in his power to destroy him. The Magi, having inner as well as outer eyes to see, pierced beyond darkness and knew God's guiding light and love. Transformed by their experience, they avoided Herod and went back another way.

Each of us might identify special calls – inner prompting that will not be denied – not ideas, but transformative events – Epiphanies. When have you been overtaken with a choice that would not be denied – perhaps life-changing events that led to marriage or other special commitments? When I was in grammar school I knew that I would one day become a Sister. However, during high school, I tested that call. I lived high school life, had a job and dated. I loved children and regularly cared for the children of my older siblings. Then during my senior retreat I experienced an undeniable call, an epiphany event. It was not a decision to be made. Rather something compelling happened to me and my path was set. That was close to 60 years ago. Of course, there have been many choices and recommitments along the way.

In the early 2000s Sr. Maggie and I thought we would be in Colorado living and serving in our affordable housing community for couple more decades. However, on 2007 we experienced a simultaneous call to move into something new (we knew not what) in Wheaton. The whole experience was a walk in faith. We did not know why we were being called. The leave-taking, moving, and farewells were difficult beyond description, but in our hearts, we knew it was right and we were unwavering. We never looked back. We were led to service at OLA and with Upendo Village as well as to a home surrounded with light and love.

The Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas, is celebrated as a manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles – to all the world. Many throughout the world give gifts and celebrate with processions and other festivities on this last day Christmas. As we open our hearts, what gifts will be ours? What gifts will we share?

We celebrate and surrender to transformation – to a path ahead that is unpredictable for each of us. It may be in relationship to family, to career, to health to the world scene. Our Franciscan Community will experience very significant transitions this year – some known and some yet to be manifest. Like the Magi our new path, involving major changes with our corporate ministries, arose out of careful research and then out of inner and outer light calling us to move forward on new paths that will be made in the walking of them. As it was with the Magi our bright star is the Christ. When we let our lights shine we, perhaps, prompt others to

do the same. I pray, with Joyce Rupp, “May you keep your eye on the Star within you and trust this Luminescent Present to guide and direct you each day”. I also pray that in the midst of challenges and letting go that each of us experiences, our hope will keep burning and that we will continue to choose life, to be open to new opportunities each day as we birth God’s light and love into our world. We are called to go forth in ever new ways to be a light and a blessing in the heart of the world.