



Bringing Home the Word

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 3, 2016

Unexpected Gifts

By Janel Esker

Several years ago, our family's longtime neighbor died. She had no children. My mom had helped her in her later years, so we weren't surprised when she received some money from the estate. What was truly surprising, though, was that a check arrived at *my* house as well. I hadn't done anything to deserve this money; I had always been polite and kind to our neighbor and had visited her sometimes, but I was shocked at her unwarranted generosity. Without knowing it, I had become an heir to this lovely woman.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

"Nations shall walk by your light, kings by the radiance of your dawning."

Ephesians 3:2–3, 5–6

"The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise."

Matthew 2:1–12

"We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

On this Solemnity of the Epiphany, we celebrate our own unexpected inheritance—the quite undeserved gift of Jesus. Saint Paul writes that the Gentiles are "coheirs" to this great gift, but what have *we* done to deserve such grace? Our culture constantly tells us how much we "deserve"—you've worked hard, so treat yourself to a new outfit, a giant bowl of ice cream, an expensive car.

But in the simplest of places—the tiniest of towns, this little hamlet of Bethlehem—comes a gift we could never do enough to deserve. The magi recognized this—they prostrated themselves in homage and were changed by their encounter with Jesus. They "went home a different way"—not just physically, but spiritually.

Now that the Christmas season is winding down and the long-awaited gifts have been unwrapped and put away, maybe we can look at the gift of Jesus with Epiphany eyes. May we welcome Jesus today like an unexpected inheritance check in our mailbox—with delighted hearts, humble spirits, and grateful souls. †

A Word from Pope Francis



"Ask the Lord to let us undergo that same journey of conversion experienced by the wise men. Let us ask him to protect us and to set us free from the temptations which hide the star. To let us always feel the troubling question: 'Where is the star?,' whenever—amid the deceptions of this world—we lose sight of it... To find the courage to be liberated from our illusions, our presumptions, our 'lights,' and to seek this courage in the humility of faith and in this way to encounter the Light, *Lumen*, like the holy wise men."

—Homily on Epiphany of the Lord,
January 6, 2015



Lord, your light gives us strength and shows us the way to God. Remove my blindness that I may see the light of goodness, peace, and love within myself and others.

—*Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

The Home Church

By Judith Dunlap

At some point, all parents end up hurting or disappointing their children. In a similar way, all spouses will eventually face pain and injury from their beloved's words or actions, perhaps even disillusionment with the relationship itself. Those hurts and disappointments can condition the way we view and treat our loved ones. We become frustrated and lose our tempers. We push too hard or say too much. We become jealous or overly sensitive. And we find ourselves hurting or disappointing even more. Those who love us do the same.

If we are lucky, our spouse and children will grow with us, and the love that blessed us from the beginning increases and matures. Our families will forgive us as we forgive them, and our love will last a lifetime.

Some people follow star after star, looking for unconditional love, only to be disappointed again and again. The only way to truly find it is to follow the star that leads to Jesus. Only God can love us unconditionally, and Jesus is the Way to God's love. Open yourself to that love so you can share it and all its acceptance and affirmation with your most precious treasures: your family.

10 Tips for Keeping New Year's Resolutions

By John McGowan, CSsR

Saint Alphonsus Liguori emphasizes the importance of making resolutions.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How do I let Christ's light shine in, and through, me?
- How can I celebrate and welcome every kind of human life?

He urges us to make a resolution after every prayer or meditation, after every retreat, before going to sleep each night. He constantly advises this *even though* most of us are better at making resolutions than carrying them through. This countdown might help:

10. Continue to make resolutions.

This reveals our good intentions and continued hope in improvement.

9. Make them specific. General resolutions are impossible to achieve. Pinpoint your goal to a particular action or virtue that can be practiced, measured, and evaluated.

8. Make it easy. Often we resolve to do the impossible. Simply continue being who you are, emphasizing your gifts, talents, and strengths.

7. Make do-able resolutions. We can't do everything, but we can do something small.

6. Look at your progress. Every improvement is a giant step. Virtue and holiness come gradually.

5. Tell someone your resolution. If it's public or someone is holding you accountable, you're less likely to give up. You may also find support and encouragement.

4. If at first you don't succeed, fail again. Anything worthwhile is going to be difficult. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly" (*What's Wrong with the Word*, Chapter 14). Some of our greatest saints failed again and again.

3. Avoid getting discouraged. Losing heart and hope is the cause of much of our grief. It is the tool the devil uses most to tempt us.

2. Learn from baseball. In the major leagues, a .300 batting average is top notch. Players congratulate a batter for "sacrificing" an out. And tomorrow is a new day and a new game.

1. Make it an act of love. If you're not personally or internally motivated by your resolution, do it for someone else or Christ himself. "Offer it up" as a redemptive form of suffering—the best kind there is. It worked for me.

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 4–9

Mon. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: 1 John 3:22–4:6 / Matthew 4:12–17, 23–25
 Tue. St. John Neumann: 1 John 4:7–10 / Mark 6:34–44
 Wed. Christmas Weekday: 1 John 4:11–18 / Mark 6:45–52

Thu. Christmas Weekday: 1 John 4:19–5:4 / Luke 4:14–22a
 Fri. Christmas Weekday: 1 John 5:5–13 / Luke 5:12–16
 Sat. Christmas Weekday: 1 John 5:14–21 / John 3:22–30