

From the Pastor's Desktop

A Message from Father Charles Puthota

January 7, 2024



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

Sunday January 7, Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord: As we celebrate this Sunday January 7 the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, we come like the three wise men to the manger and look upon the divine baby, bearing our own "gifts." Epiphany, as you know, means manifestation, revelation. The feast recognizes that Jesus is savior not just for one nation or one people but for the whole world. The three wise men, having adored the holy baby, will take with them the astounding news of the mysterious birth of the savior to their nations and thus help spread the good news to the ends of the earth. Therefore, at the heart of this event, there is a message---and invitation---for us to make Christ the new-born King known to the world through our love and faith. What could I say and do to make Jesus known? What are the values I need to live by in order to make Jesus be born spiritually in the world now?

There are certain things we could explore as inspiration from the event of the Epiphany. Are we ready to make the journey to the new-born baby? It would involve getting out of our familiar "places," our own positions, our own way of thinking and acting, our ideological boundaries, and undertaking a journey of spiritual and intellectual and psychological adventure. Can we see the "star" that is sent to guide and lead us? What is that star in our lives today? In what form and shape do we see that star? How does God speak and guide us in our current circumstances? Does he use our own family members and friends to send those messages of guidance and protection? Is the faith family, the Church, through its rituals and sacraments, its witness and proclamation, a place where you can discover that star? Or, do we miss God's signs of love and grace? Do the poor and disadvantaged Jesus identifies with (Matthew 25, the Last Judgment) help us see that "star"? God is speaking to us through the signs of the times. May we have the courage and discernment to make the journey to Christ our Lord, to recognize him in people and circumstances, and having adored him, let's go by another way back to where we came from, so that we could live by a new vision, a new spirit, characterized by a whole new meaning, urgency, and purpose.

Monday January 8, the Baptism of the Lord: After celebrating the heart-warming birthday of Jesus at Christmas, we meditated on the Holy Family and the Epiphany. Our families will do well in modeling themselves on the Holy Family. When Jesus is present in our families, we have everything, all the strength, grace, and courage we need to face anything. Epiphany prepared us for the conviction that Jesus is Lord for all the nations and cultures and that we are all called to help reveal Jesus to our families, neighborhoods, and the whole world. We are moving along briskly on the journey with Christ. Now we have come to the Baptism of the Lord as he begins his public ministry. In Mark's gospel today, as Jesus is being baptized we see the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and the Heavenly Father who says, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

There are some insights that we could dwell on. 1. Jesus is guided by the Holy Spirit and is always eager to do his Father's will. We could follow Jesus in this regard. 2. Jesus did not need the baptism and yet he insists on it as a way of inserting himself into our humanity and vulnerability. Jesus' incarnational participation in our human nature begun at his nativity continues at his baptism. 3. Jesus is called, anointed, and sent by his Father to bring new life and hope to the whole world. We too are called to fulfill the purpose for which God has brought us into the world. 4. Each of us is God's "beloved daughter or son." God is "well pleased" with us. So let's not go about carrying guilt or hopelessness. Our God loves us and delights in us, despite our sinfulness. It's precisely because of God's being "well pleased" with us that we can turn our ways around to his. 5. As Jesus begins a new journey with his public ministry after the Baptism, each of us was baptized to walk a new journey of grace and holiness. How are we doing in that regard? Is our baptismal anointing and empowerment still shining in our lives? The Baptism of the Lord is an occasion for us to take stock of our lives.

Christmas Season Concludes and Ordinary Time Begins: Christmas season continues and comes to a close with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, this year on January 8. January 9, the Ordinary Time begins. I hope your Christmas celebrations and the rest of the season went well, filling you with joy and peace. As you well know, Christmas is too important to be over in 24 hours' time. The mystery of Christ's birth continues. The beauty of the Incarnation is a never-ending reality. Jesus becoming one with us is a continuous process. The vital implication of his presence with us is that we are made sacred forever. We are sinful but sacred at the same time because of the Christmas mystery. We are sinners but graced! When God has become one with us, why should we be afraid? Because the Lord of the Incarnation has pitched his tent with us, we can keep striving for all those things that make us better human beings and Christians.

Humor: 1. A man is talking to God. "God, how long is a million years?" God answers, "To me, it's about a minute." "God, how much is a million dollars?" "To me, it's a penny." "God, may I have a penny?" God says, "Wait a minute." 2. A woman is making pancakes for her kids, and the kids start arguing over who is going to get the first pancake. Deciding it's a good time for a moral lesson, she says to them, "You know, if Jesus were sitting here, He would say 'let my brother have the first pancake.'" One of the brothers looks at the other and says, "Okay, you be Jesus!"

Wishing you and your families God's continuous presence and grace in the New Year 2024,

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Charles Puthota