

Reflection for January 7, 2017

The feast of the Epiphany draws to a close the Christmas season and for us this year, it draws to a close of the celebration of the 165th Anniversary of our founding.

As the Christmas season ends, we have Matthew's narrative of the arrival of the Magi looking for the new born King. Do you wonder about these sages who traveled into a foreign country following the light of a star? Did they know each other before they started this journey? Did they meet up somewhere along the way? Were they traveling alone or did they have a group traveling with them? And then at the end of the passage it says: they returned to their own country.... by a different route.... but then what happened to them? Matthew doesn't tell us much other than they were from the East, had seen his star rising and had come to do homage to the newborn King and they brought gifts with them. Tradition tells us a bit more about them but they seem to pass through the narrative and are never heard about again. But I wonder.....they encountered Jesus.

They entered the house and saw the child with Mary, they presented their gifts to him, they came before him with great respect and honor.....they encountered Jesus. How could their lives not be changed??

If we fast forward to the time of Francis Bernadone, we see a rather self- centered young man from a fairly wealthy family roaming the streets of Assisi, living a comfortable life, traveling with and for his father and dreaming about becoming a knight (maybe to attract the notice of his friends and perhaps several young ladies of the village) and actually trying to live out that dream by riding off to war with the neighboring cities. It is only when he encounters Jesus that his life changes. Something deep within himself leads him to see the abiding love that God has for him and for all of creation. The tiny point of light that was there all along bursts into the bright light of seeing the face of God in everyone and everything. The light that shone so brightly in Francis led others of his day to recognize God's love for them and for all of creation. That light still continues to burn in the Franciscan family today.

Some 165 years ago, a young woman left Austria to come to a new land in order to found a new religious community of women in the middle of the Indiana. I can't imagine how terrifying the voyage across the ocean must have been or how frightening it was to arrive by herself in a foreign country and not really know where she was going. But we do know Theresa Hackelmeier did complete her journey safely and on the evening of January 5, 1851 arrived in Oldenburg. I wonder what she thought looking into the little village which was to be her new home. I wonder if she had any idea of what she would need physically, emotionally and spiritually to make this new venture a reality. She did have the one thing that would prove to be her most valuable asset....she had encountered Jesus, and would continue to do so

throughout her life. Her life had been changed and would continue to be changed. She would respond to every possible need that she could. She would encourage others to do the same and her little community grew and prospered.

And what about today?

Here we are standing at the closing of the 165th Anniversary of our founding. We are grateful for those who have gone before us and what has been accomplished over all of those years. We are rightfully proud of the works completed and yet humbled by the courage and fortitude of all of Sisters no longer with us. Each of these Sisters encountered Jesus...and how their lives had been changed. Each heard the voice deep within themselves that led them to follow the light of the Epiphany star. Each became a wise woman who brought her gifts to the newborn king and recognized God's love for all of creation. Each let the tiny point of God's bright light within burst forth into their life and the lives of others. And that light still burns in our Franciscan family today.

With every end there is a new beginning...with every closing there is an opportunity of a new start. Today is not just the end of a year of celebration but an invitation to a new beginning of living out our Franciscan heritage and call. We are not traveling alone we have each other. We have our own gifts to bring to the newborn king...gifts that only we can bring because they are uniquely our gifts. We have heard the voice deep within leading us to follow the light of the Epiphany star. We...all of us...have encountered Jesus ...and how can our lives not be changed?

We are called to renewal, to looking at our lives as they are being lived in this time and in this place. Perhaps we are called to follow a slightly different direction than in our past...but we have done that before. As we stand on the edge of a new beginning, Pope Francis said, "The Magi followed a new and different star-----which for them shone quite brightly."

The light of the Epiphany star that led our early Sisters, that led Mother Theresa that led St. Francis, that led the Magi never really goes out as long as we are open to newness, to challenges, to encountering Jesus. A new and different star is bursting forth...and it will shine for us just as brightly.

So that we may be

Blessed in our heritage, rich in our traditions, challenged in our future,

As we rededicate ourselves to venture on in simplicity, openness and joy.