

January and the Feast of the Epiphany

A friend never tires of reminding me that “January is a month without which life would be greatly improved—annual reports, final days of reckoning with postponed business, new budgets, clearing out files, starting new ones, forgetting those wonderful resolutions made on New Year’s Eve and feeling guilty about the failures, to say nothing of Christmas bills.”

“January,” he attests, “is a miserable, harassed, sniveling, crass, over-bearing, worldly wretch of a month.”

And I never tire of reminding that friend about January 6, about the Feast of the Epiphany. “January is like the Epiphany. January and the Epiphany are all about gifts.” Gifts.

Every January 6, the prophet Third Isaiah tells of gifts being carried to Jerusalem, the holy city:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn....You shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense.

(The Book of the prophet Isaiah 60: 1-6)

Matthew writes of gifts brought to a new-born king:

Wise men from the East set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

(The Gospel according to Matthew 2: 1-12)

The author of the Letter to the Church in Ephesus writes of gifts given by God, in and through Christ, to both Jews and Gentiles who are now made one in him:

In former generations, the mystery of Christ was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

(The Letter to the Ephesians 3: 1-12)

Three stories, stories of people journeying and searching in response to the God who called them.

January is a gift, thirty-one days for us to journey and search in reply to the God who calls us; thirty-one days for us to come to the place where we, at last, discover a child. Who is that child? Where is that child? That child is the new person God is calling you and me to become.

It is for the birthing of that child inside ourselves that God asks us to give our gifts—our gold, our frankincense, our myrrh; the deepest elements of our hearts and minds and souls and strength—our energy, our integrity, our intelligence, our loyalties, our hope.

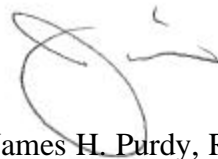
When we allow the child within us to be born, we will strive to bring to life that child of hope and possibility and new creation at every other level—in our relationships, in our vocations, in our play, in the world of our day.

Through each of us, the eternal and holy child of hope and possibility can be born daily, not in a remote past, but in the present—even in January, in “that miserable, harassed, sniveling, crass, over-bearing, worldly wretch of a month.”

As another friend puts it,

Do you see a great and mysterious thing? You are the story. You yourself are the child of God who is daily being called into birth. You yourself are also the wise man or woman seeking the child. You yourself are the living, breathing Bethlehem in which the Christ child is continually being born.

Thank you, dear God, for January.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James H. Purdy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a smaller loop at the end.

James H. Purdy, Rector