

The Church of Saint Boniface

January 3, 2021

The Epiphany of the Lord



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

(Matthew 2, 2)

FATHER'S DESK

Guest Reflection

The Light of Christ

The word Epiphany means “an appearance or manifestation,” especially of a deity. Our celebrations of the Epiphany shows the Magi making their way to the newborn Jesus and his family. The child “showed himself forth” to them, like a candle shows forth in the dark.

No longer shall the sun be your light by day,
Nor the brightness of the moon shine upon you at night;
The Lord shall be your light forever,
your God shall be your glory
(Is 60:19)

The Magi followed light from far away (Persia?), the star which led them through the darkness to the tiny yet powerful light of Christ. It is a sweet story. We rejoice.

But we do remember that darkness is at hand also, the bad kind, the smoldering human rubble found all over the world in so many countries. The Magi speak of it on their journey, as imagined by TS Eliot:

*... Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches. ...*

And there was deeper darkness to come. The Wise Men moved, weary, into Jerusalem, and then straight into the jaws of the power-hungry, luxury-loving King Herod. They asked a question to the Jerusalem citizens that shocked Herod greatly when it got back to him. “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage” (Gospel).

Ouch. The question revealed a stunning fact. There is to be a new king instead of Herod!

Herod oiled his way to his chief priests and scribes. He ordered them to scour scripture for hints about this horror—uh, no, this holy birth. In response they announced in a dignified manner that the long-awaited Messiah, **King of the Jews, will be born “in Bethlehem of Juda.” But this is just what Herod and his offspring were: Kings of the Jews.** He called the Magi to him, smiled, faked holy interest, then made his plans. Make no mistake. At this point Herod knew clearly he was dealing with God’s own design for the world, foretold by the scriptures of the very people he was supposed to be leading. Herod made up his mind to commit an atrocity.

You know the story. The Magi had found and worshipped the tiny Christ. Herod, still in the dark, sent out troops to slaughter all boy babies of two years old or less in Bethlehem and surroundings, just to eliminate this so-called “King” (Mt 2:13-16). And, speaking of having “a hard time of it,” in Eliot’s words, Jesus’ parents had to cross the harsh desert into Egypt in order to save him.

This child was like a candle in the wind.

Why do the readings talk so much about dark night on this Epiphany, which is the very feast of the dayspring? It is a complicated question, but here is one answer.

Because God’s light only comes to us thoroughly mingled with the grubby reality of human life. Why else did he come as an infant? The Christ did not arrive to erase our troubles but to join us in them, to be a quiet light in our darkness, not a blinding replacement for the dark.

So we have to be like the Magi. We have to have our own puzzling, sleepless nights, and we have to search and search, and never ever rest until we see the light as God chose to reveal it.

MASS INTENTIONS

Jan. 8	10:30 AM	Lillian McCann , by Mary O'Malley
Jan. 10	8:00 AM	John McShane , by Carol McShane
Jan. 14	10:30 AM	Souls in Purgatory , by Mary O'Malley
Jan. 15	8:00 AM	Robert Bourgeois (21st Anniv.), by Gloria Bourgeois
Jan. 16	4:00 PM	Peter Charpentier , by Mom and Dad
Jan. 17	10:30 AM	Charlie Blanchard (10th Anniversary) & Tricia Blanchard (1st Anniversary) by Meghan Blanchard
Jan. 21	8:00 AM	The DeCato/LaBombard Families , by Mary O'Malley
Jan. 22	8:00 AM	Lillian McCann , by Mary O'Malley

PRAY THE ROSARY every Saturday at 3:30 PM in the church, led by members of the Saint Boniface Knights of Columbus.

CONDOLENCES

Our parish offers its prayers and sympathy to the family of parishioner Yolande LeBlanc who passed away on December 21, 2020. **May she rest in God's eternal peace.**

NO DAILY 8:00 AM MASSES NEXT WEEK (January 6, 7 & 8)



The Saint Boniface Knights of Columbus are sponsoring a diaper drive throughout the month of January to support CareNet Pregnancy Resource Center of Fitchburg. Donations of diapers, baby wipes and formula may be placed in front of the statue of Saint Joseph by the pulpit. Thank you for your generosity and support.



CARENET
Pregnancy
Resource Center
of North Central Massachusetts, Inc.

This pregnancy center offers many free services to men and women facing unplanned pregnancies including counseling, tests, obstetrical ultrasounds and confirmation of pregnancy. Medical services are provided by our licensed nurses. This center does not offer abortions or abortion referrals. We do offer

education about abortion and abortion alternatives.

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Office hours: 10am – 4pm, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

A Note from Our Religious Education Director

This year for Religious Education may have been different but we are strong and steadfast in the commitment to bring you a program to educate your children in the Catholic faith. You have stepped up and been our partners in this and we thank you. Going forward, we hope to have more times when we can gather as a faith community once again.

Out of an abundance of caution, we will be postponing classes until February. Please refer to the new schedule that was emailed to all families (also find it on the website: www.stboniface-lunenburg.org/religious-ed-calendar), with some adjusted times so that there are not too many people in the church at one time. First Communion families will have two make-up sessions: one is on Reconciliation and one is on Eucharist.

I look forward to the time when our program is once again full and operating. There will a lot to celebrate. May God's peace and love surround you all in 2021. You are all in my prayers.

~ Lucy Marcil

COLLECTION REPORT

Christmas Masses	
– Sunday Offering	\$ 150
– Christmas Offering	2,465
Total	<u>\$2,615</u>
December 26/27	
– Sunday Offering	\$2,162
– Fuel/Maintenance	30
– Christmas Offering	80
Total	<u>\$2,272</u>

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Give to our parish whether you're in the pews or not! Many parishioners have been making their **weekly offerings online. It's secure, convenient** and easy to make one-time or recurring donations at www.stboniface-lunenburg.org



NEXT SUNDAY WE CELEBRATE THE
'BAPTISM OF OUR LORD'

The Mass schedule will be as usual:

Saturday 4:00 PM Vigil Mass

Sunday 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM Mass

Perfected Revelation

The “epiphany” of Jesus, his revelation to the world, was accompanied by the offering of three gifts, each of which symbolized a different aspect of the divine/human savior.

Frankincense is offered to Jesus, the Son of God, the eternal Word of the Father who is worshiped with the Father and the Spirit. Gold is offered to Jesus the King of the human race, the summit of creation.

Myrrh is offered to the divine/human savior of the world who suffered and died for the salvation of all.

Jesus is revealed in our own day. He is revealed as the Word of God speaking to us in the marvelous workings of nature, in the achievements of the human spirit, and in the dialogue between Church and world.

He is revealed to us as King in every victory over ignorance, alienation and powerlessness. He is revealed to us as Suffering Messiah in the heart and face of every poor person, every stranger, every wanderer living in a back alley or under a bridge, every person victimized by others.

“His glory has shone among us.” We have only to recognize him and to do what the magi did in his presence: “They prostrated themselves and did him homage.”

Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth.

Vatican II,
Constitution on Divine Revelation,
1965:4

— Gerald Darring

Saints of the Week

January 4.

SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON

Convert, wife, mother, widow, teacher, religious — Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton did it all. Yet, in many ways, she was an ordinary woman of her time who lived life in an extraordinary way.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton is the patron saint of Catholic Schools and Loss of Parents.



January 5.

SAINT JOHN NEUMANN

Saint John Neumann was the first member of his community, the Redemptorists, to profess vows in the United States. He did missionary work in Maryland, Virginia, and Ohio and became the bishop of Philadelphia. Noted for his humility and organizational skills, he helped form the Church in the new world.



January 6.

SAINT ANDRÉ BESSETTE

Saint André Bessette was orphaned at 12, and eventually worked in the United States during the Civil War. At 25, he became a Brother of the Holy Cross. Having a deep devotion to Saint Joseph from childhood, Saint André built the Oratory on Mount Royal in his honor. Although sickly most of his life, Saint André lived to be 92.



January 7.

SAINT RAYMOND of PEÑAFORT

Saint Raymond of Peñafort was a lawyer who used his talents to both compile legislation for easy access and to write legal treatises on penance for the use of confessors. He was named Archbishop of Tarragona, but resigned due to sickness within two years. He lived to be 100.

Saint Raymond of Peñafort is the patron saint of Lawyers.



January 8.

SAINT ANGELA of FOLIGNO

Saint Angela of Foligno was a wife and mother who had little interest in the spiritual life until about the age 40. After her husband and children died, Saint Angela entered the Secular Franciscans living a life of prayer and service. Others were attracted to her way of life and they formed a religious community.



Bestowing Honor

Matthew alone reports this story about the Magi. No other ancient documents corroborate the account as actual, historical fact. Contemporary scholars believe that it was probably a preexisting tradition based on the Balaam story (Num 22-24) intending to demonstrate that Gentiles were part of God's plan from the very beginning. Scholars are divided, though, in their estimation of the degree of creativity exercised by the evangelist in shaping this story for his Gospel.

Mediterranean people, however, maintain a very porous boundary line between reality and appearance, fact and impressions. The appearance or impression is always considered much more significant than reality or the fact. This, of course, is all driven by that culture's overarching concern for honor, that is, public recognition and affirmation of proclaimed worth.

Joseph knows he is not the father of the child Mary is carrying (Mt 1:19). Matthew doesn't hide this fact. An angel of the Lord, a most honorable messenger from God, the source of all honor that counts, informs Joseph of the divinely willed circumstances of Jesus' conception and the function Jesus will play in God's plan: "He will save his people from their sins." But so far as we know, Joseph doesn't make this message public. He apparently lived with the secret all his life and presented a different impression to the public.

How can the evangelist give an honorable public appearance to the potentially embarrassing circumstances of Jesus' conception? Matthew begins Jesus' story with a genealogy, which in the ancient world is a key strategy for documenting one's claim to honor.

Matthew does it cleverly with a number scheme based on David's name. Hebrew letters are also numbers, and the consonants DVD in Hebrew add up to fourteen. In this genealogy, Matthew clusters names in three groups of fourteen, more or less. The point: Jesus is none other than a descendent of David, Israel's greatest king!

Then Matthew reports the tradition about the Magi (not kings or astrologers) coming to pay homage to this descendant of royalty. A closer look at the story through the lenses of Mediterranean honor reveals how cleverly Matthew magnifies Jesus' honor rating.

King of Judeans

The Magi come seeking the newly born king of Judeans. Matthew and Matthew's Jesus during his ministry routinely identify God's people as "Israel" (see Mt 2:6; also 8:10; 9:33; 10:6, 23; 15:24, 31; 19:28; 27:9). Three groups make up this people: "Judeans," "Galileans," and "Pereans." Outsiders



When the Magi find Jesus, they pay homage.

ignored these distinctions and called everyone Judeans" (the Greek word is often incorrectly translated "Jews"). Pilate calls Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee "King of the Judeans" (Jn 19:19-22).

Word that these visitors from the East are seeking a newly born king of Judeans strikes fear into the heart of old Herod who is the current, living king of Judeans. He knows that he has no newly born heir.

Then Matthew draws a contrast between these honorable visitors and the fearful ruler. Herod calls for the Magi "secretly" (Mt 2:7). In the Middle East and all societies in which honor is the core value, privacy is a threat to honor. If honor is a public claim to worth along with a public acknowledgement of that worth, then people's behavior must be ever on public display. Anyone who acts secretly has something to hide and is therefore automatically considered to be dishonorable, shameful. Herod's secret inquiry immediately tags him as acting dishonorably.

The Magi listen to his request, asking that they report to him what they find about this new king, but, astute Middle Easterners that they are, they refuse to enter into his shameful strategy. They return home by a different route (Mt 2:12), thereby deceiving the shameful Herod (Mt 2:16).

When the Magi find Jesus, they pay homage. The high, honorable status of these visitors indicates the high degree of honor they pay to Jesus and his mother. They also offer three kinds of gifts (gold, myrrh, and frankincense), further enhancing the honor they bestow. Matthew has masterfully cast Jesus into an impressively honorable context that does not fail to catch the attention of his original Middle Eastern audience.

Have We Met the Magi?

We had come to think of them as Amahl's night visitors (thanks to Menotti) or as three multicultural kings arriving a few days behind the shepherds at the Christmas cave. Matthew would be charmed but would likely remind us that magi are not kings but astrologers and interpreters of dreams, that the number three, while a reasonable guess from the number of the gifts, is not really part of the story, and that he had in mind not a cave but the house where the holy family lived in Bethlehem.

As for the star, our author would be amazed at the speculations spawned by that detail: a supernova? a comet? a conjunction of planets? Although any of these phenomena could catch the eye and arouse conjecture about an important birth, none could offer precise travel guidance to a local address (any more than comet Hale-Bopp could pinpoint a particular home today). No, he would say; it is a miracle story meant to point to a meaning beyond itself. The star means to recall the prophecy of the magos Balaam in Numbers 24 and to highlight the significance of Jesus' birth within the whole thrust of the story of Israel suggested by other elements of the story: travel into and out of Egypt, escape from a murderous ruler, the vocation to be a light to the Gentiles.

If it is a symbolic story, it is also profoundly historical in its interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' birth. For Herod the Great was indeed a contemporary pharaoh—i.e., a monumental builder and a ruler who would use his power murderously when it suited his purposes. And Jesus truly did turn out to be a king whose power challenged abusive secular power such as that of Herod. Jesus was indeed rejected by the religious leadership of his day ("chief priests and scribes"). And Jesus would be accepted, indeed worshiped, more widely by Gentiles than by the historic people of Israel. Jesus would prove himself a Moses figure leading his people on a new Exodus.

Most of us need the help of our own scribes to hear these truths in the narrative, but Matthew could have expected most of his original readers to catch on immediately. What the full Gospel of Matthew would unfold at length in twenty-eight chapters is forecast here in a couple of scenes.

The baby born in Joseph's home in David's town of Bethlehem is the son of David. He will, as risen Lord, turn out to be everything, and more, suggested by the words of Micah and Second Samuel quoted at the heart of today's Gospel—ruler and shepherd of his people.

And the child will fulfill the best hopes of Israel for itself. Everything the last chapters of Isaiah (especially today's

First Reading) have to say in the vision of a restored Zion, a light and source of hope to surrounding nations seeking a way out of darkness, finds the beginning of fulfillment in Jesus born in Bethlehem. What could be lost on us—and may be of special importance for us—is the story's implication that Jesus is the son of Abraham. For as

Genesis tells it, Abraham himself was a Gentile, called out of Mesopotamia to be, with Sarah's help, the father of a people through whom Yahweh's covenant to the nations would be renewed; in other words, a Gentile bridging God's love to Gentiles. (See Gen 12:3, where Yahweh says to Abram: "All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.") The fulfillment of this is precisely what Matthew portrays in the coming of the Gentile Magi.

Where are we in this picture? We are the heirs of the Magi, Gentiles who have been led to share in the promises to Israel. The big question for us then is, "How are we to enable Christ to be a light to the nations today?" What makes that question different for us now than it might have been even just thirty years ago is that we no longer see non-Christians as benighted "pagans." The World Almanac reminds me that the 1.87 billion of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our light comprise no more than one-third of the world population. Of the rest, only 4 percent identify themselves as godless (atheist). For millions of others, Gautama is the "Buddha" or "Enlightened one" and thus their "light." For a billion Muslims, the Quran is their light and it is Muhammad who personally focuses its message. Similar things could be said of the other major world religions.

Ever since Vatican II's Declaration on the Church's Relations with Non-Christian Religions (Nostra aetate, 1965), we Catholics have claimed to look upon non-Christian religious traditions as ways of at least glimpsing the divine mystery and the path of right living whose full epiphany we find in the humanity of Jesus. This would seem to follow the spirit of the adult Jesus who could portray a heretic Samaritan as an exemplar of Torah righteousness and who could rejoice in the faith he found in the Syro-Phoenician woman and in the Roman centurion.

We are probably wrong to expect the political leaders of the world to establish peace. Better to hope that full shalom will come when the four billion of us who believe in a Transcendent Other are converted more deeply to the enlightenment that calls us all not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, not to lust, to respect parents, and to help the needy and weak. Jesus will be manifested as the light for the nations when we catch his fire more fully and share it. We have met the Magi "and they are us."

Nations shall walk by your light.

(Isaiah 60:3)

Saint Boniface Church

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Parish Office Hours

Monday / Wednesday / Thursday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM (closed 12:00 – 1:00 PM)

The Celebration of the Eucharist

Sunday: 8:00 AM, 10:30 AM, 6:00 PM

Saturday Vigil: 4:00 PM

Summer Sunday Mass schedule: 9:00 AM
(Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend)

Weekday Masses: 8:00 AM, Wednesday/Thursday/Friday

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION (Confession) Saturday 3:00 - 3:30 p.m. or by appointment.

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM Adults are baptized at the Easter Vigil as part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Infant and child Baptisms are by arrangement.

FIRST EUCHARIST Preparation begins in grade one and includes classes, retreats, and home instruction. Children receive First Eucharist in grade two.

CONFIRMATION Our Confirmation program begins in the 9th grade; students are confirmed in the spring of the 10th grade. For young adults who have been baptized but not yet confirmed, contact the parish office.

SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY It is the policy of the Diocese of Worcester that a couple should contact the parish at least one year prior to the anticipated date of their wedding to allow sufficient time to carry out the various steps of the marriage preparation process. It is important that arrangements be made with the church before plans are made with reception halls, caterers, etc.

ANNOINTING OF THE SICK Please call the parish office 978-582-4008 or email Fr. Anthony at stbonifaceparish@verizon.net or Nancy Cieri 978-582-6983 nancycieri@comcast.net to arrange these visits.

PRAYER LINE MINISTRY If you or someone you know needs prayers or if you would like to be a part of this ministry of those who pray for the needs of neighbors, please contact Sue Cote 978-582-0404 sj33@msn.com.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCIL #16480 *In Service to One. In Service to all.* Members meet in the Parish Hall on the first Wednesday of each month at 7 PM. Any Catholic men over 18 who are interested in joining the Knights should contact Grand Knight Peter Bak (978-403-5119) or Deputy Grand Knight Claude Poirier (978-660-3202), or email kofc16480@gmail.com.

PARISH STAFF:

	<i>phone</i>	<i>email</i>
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Louise Nadeau, Sacristan		
Ministry Schedule	978-582-4008	stbonifaceparish@verizon.net
Nina Charpentier, Dir. Early Childhood/PreK	978-582-7110	

Newcomers to St. Boniface are invited and encouraged to formally register as members of the parish so that we may stay in touch with you with faith formation news, notices of special events, volunteer opportunities, and more.

Registration forms are available at the doors of the church, the parish office, or on our website.

Please note that you must be registered for at least six months before we can issue any verification of your status as a parishioner for godparent or sponsor letters.

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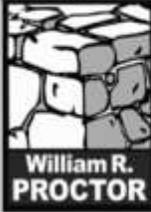
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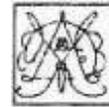
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