

Sermon by Reverend Nur'llah (Cathy) Layland, Emerging Light Sufi Center, Lehigh Valley, PA
Welcome!

Welcome New Year!

Welcome a symbolic, or perhaps a real New Beginning, a blank canvas?

A few weeks ago, January 6, was a special day in Christian tradition, Epiphany.

Epiphany, a celebration of God manifesting as the baby Jesus and revealing Himself to the world, the day the Magi, or the three kings, visited the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. The holiday is also known as Three Kings Day.

The message of Epiphany can be interpreted in several ways. Some see a message of faith in divine guidance, symbolized by the phenomena of the alignment of stars whose light guided seekers from afar to Bethlehem.

I am reminded of this poem from Hazrat Inayat Khan:

Riding on the horse of hope

Riding on the horse of hope,

Holding in my hand the rein of courage,

Clad in the armor of patience,

And the helmet of endurance on my head,

I started on my journey to the land of love.

A lance of stern faith in my hand,

And the sword of firm conviction buckled on,

With the knapsack of sincerity

And the shield of earnestness,

I advanced on the path of love.

My ears closed to the disturbing noise of the world,

My eyes turned from all that was calling me on the Way,

My heart beating the rhythm of my ever-rising aspiration,

And my blazing soul guiding me on the path,

I made my way through the space.

I went through the thick forests of perpetual desire,

I crossed the running rivers of longing.

I passed through the deserts of silent suffering,

I climbed the steep hills of continual strife.

Feeling ever some presence in the air, I asked, "Are you there, my love?"

And a voice came to my ears, saying, “No, still further am I.”

— Hazrat Inayat Khan, from the Alankaras in Vadan, or The Divine Symphony

The details of the pilgrimage are vague. When did they arrive? Some say days after the birth, others say as much as two years.

How many came? There were 3 gifts, but the Christian Scriptures don't give a number of visitors. There may have been an entire caravan... or several, from many places.... And from where? India? From Persia, perhaps Zoroastrians? From Egypt? Or as suggested by Isaiah, from Jordan and Saudi Arabia, a source of Frankincense and myrrh. Maybe from Yemen, with abundant sources of gold? Perhaps there was a convergence of numerous caravans, unknown to one another before this quest.

And then, who were they? Priests, Kings, or, as one name for them, Magi implies, magicians?

From The Book of Isaiah, the first of the Latter Prophets in the Hebrew Bible and the first of the Major Prophets in the Christian Old Testament:

“Arise! Shine, for your light has come,
the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you
. . . Nations shall walk by your light,
Kings by the radiance of your dawning.

“Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you —
Your sons from afar
. . . Then you shall see and be radiant
. . . For the riches of the sea shall be poured out before you,
the wealth of nations shall come to you.
Caravans of camels shall cover you,
dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;
All from Sheba shall come
bearing gold and frankincense
and heralding the praises of the Lord” (vv. 1-6).

Wow.

So, what is the message of Epiphany to us, today, in this time, in our lives? Is it of the star, Faith in turning to the light? Is it a message of trust and courage to set off on potentially perilous journey(s) into lands unknown? A message about seeking Divine Guidance to follow in the mundane world?

In the Epiphany story, the Light bid them to **action**. They didn't sit in the comfort of their lives, the known, the tried and true and wait, even pray, for the child to come to them. They organized themselves and their entourages for unknown terrain, unknown resources of food and water and shelter, for an unknown distance and time, facing unknown obstacles of weather, of welcome, perhaps even bandits along the way. Imagine the resistance they were met with from their

family, friends, business partners (employers). Imagine the financial commitment of praying for such a quest. Imagine the margins of fear, of doubt, the temptation to NOT act.

And still they came. They answered the Divine call with action, co-creators of their lives unfolding, co-creators of the outcome.

So what of us, on the threshold of a new year, a fresh start, a blank canvas. How will we respond? Will we gaze in wonder at the Light from the comfort of what we know. Or will we seize this opportunity to co-create, stepping into the unknown journey of our New Year, with hope, with courage, with patience, endurance, and faith, conviction, sincerity and in earnest.

Arise!

Shine!

Divinity has dawned within you!

Note:

These lands are now Jordan, Saudi Arabia (Frankincense and myrrh) and Yemen (gold)

These three, or many more, journeyed with faith and devotion far far far into unknown territory seeking the Divine child. Let us also embody such faith and devotion in our journeys toward The One.

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