

January 5, 2014 – Feast of the Epiphany – Year A
Three People/Three Letters

Happy 12th Day of Christmas!

Like bookends, Christmas and Epiphany enclose the 12 days of the Christmas celebration.

I hope that these 12 days of Christmas have been a blessing for you
 – family, friends, feasting, food, parties, gifts, music, singing, and a bit of a reprieve from some of the drudgery of daily living and its responsibilities.

I also hope that amidst all the cards that you have received,
 the liturgies that you have attended ,
 the carols that you have heard and sung,
 amidst all those things,
 the Lord has touched you again, maybe even in a new or special way.

Something different has caught my attention this year.

The pattern centers on the number 3.

The first example is the three people intimately tied together at Christmas
 – Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

What a unique group of three are they!

A man and a woman – a pretty common group.

But then comes Jesus

- never before and never after
- God coming to humanity in the form of one of our very own
- a human being while at that same time the infinite God.

Yes, Mary and Joseph are the adults but it is all about that baby,
 that God-man, that Jesus.

Three people – Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

Angels announce Jesus to Mary, announce Jesus to Joseph, announce Jesus to the shepherds tending their flocks.

Three announcements by angels.

Then God makes an announcement to astrologists in Persia.

Persia is at least 1500 miles from Bethlehem.

The astrologists have studied the stars and planets.

They also know the many stories that people attribute to the objects in the night sky.

When unusual things happen in the night sky the astrologists try to make sense of them.

One night three astrologists are looking up at the sky.

Their names, according to some traditions, are: Casper, Melchior and Balthazar.

Up in the sky they see that the planets Jupiter and Saturn are close to each other ... and they had never seen that before.

Nobody they knew had ever heard of that ever happening before.

Nowhere in their records had anyone ever recorded such an event.

As they try to understand the event they think about where in the sky the two planets came together.

It was in the star pattern or constellation known as Pisces, the fish.

To those Persian astrologists that meant that it had something to do with that country over to the west, that country by the sea, that country called Israel.

That all happened in May.

They recorded it.

They thought about it.

They wondered about it.

Things went back to normal.

Jupiter and Saturn went back to their separate spots in the sky.

Summer came and went and then in September it happened all over again.

Jupiter and Saturn were together in the constellation of Pisces -- again.

More questions. More wondering. Still, no clear cut answer!

Can they just sit there and stare at the sky?

What to do?

As they trade stories with others they begin to realize that something dramatically important is happening in Israel.

It must be the birth of some new, great king!

Let's go see!

Let's bring some gifts for him since he's obviously super important.

Casper, Melchior and Balthazar start their trek to Israel, to Jerusalem, the capital city in Israel, the place for kings.

They travel with camels to haul their food, clothes and gifts.

As they travel Saturn and Jupiter again move apart.

But ... they are still determined to go to Jerusalem.

After a long trek they arrive in Jerusalem.

They go to the king, King Herod, to find out about this new king.

Herod sends them to Bethlehem.

It's now December.

A third time Jupiter and Saturn come close to each other in Pisces!

There's no doubt about it now!

They come to Bethlehem and find the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Modern scientists, astronomers, know exactly when this all happened in the sky.

So, we ask, "Did God use nature this way to give such a unique message to the Magi, to Casper, Melchior and Balthazar?"

Is that the real story of the Star of Bethlehem?

Well, God can do whatever he pleases!

Maybe God sent a comet... or a new star ... or a ...???

What did the Magi, really see in the sky?

We don't know that part of the story!

The Bible does not give us a scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem.

The Bible tells us that God loves us and sent his Jesus as evidence of that love.

The number three, the three members of the Holy Family, three announcements from angels, and the Three Magi.

Interestingly, a three-letter word seems to pop up often in the Scriptures of the Christmas season.

The three letter word is "ALL".

Let me share some examples.

In fact, the ushers can pass out some cards listing the Scriptures.

The first Scripture example is from today's psalm, Psalm 72.

(this is one side of the card)

Psalm 72 (Epiphany Sunday psalm)

All kings shall pay him homage,
all nations shall serve him.

Daniel 3:81, 83 (Morning Prayer)

All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord.
Praise and exalt him above **all** forever.

St. Paul/Colossians 1:15-17 (Christmas Evening Prayer)

He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God,
the first-born of **all** creatures.
In him everything in heaven and on earth was
created,
things visible and invisible.
All were created through him;
all were created for him.
He is before **all** else that is.
In him everything continues in existence.

When the psalm says “**all**” there are no restrictions.

Young or old, rich or poor, American, African, European or Asian.

All are to pay homage to the Lord.

In the second Scripture example, the prophet Daniel speaks to us in the Church’s Liturgy of the Hours on great feasts – like Christmas and Epiphany.

It address **all** nature and tells **all** the world,
from rocks to animals to humans,
to bless, praise and exalt the Lord above **all** ...
and to do that forever, for **all** times.

The third Scripture quote is from a reading used many times for the Church’s Evening Prayer during the 12 Days of Christmas.

St. Paul gives an insight into what the early Church thought and knew about Jesus.

Jesus was intimately involved with **all** creation for **all** times.

Three letters in the word “all”

If you turn that card over you will see a summary of what we have been considering over the 12 Days of Christmas.

The Holy Family centers on Jesus.

The Magi travelled from Persia to see the infant Jesus.
 The word “*all*” tells us that *all* peoples and *all* nature need
 to bless, praise and exalt the Lord at *all* times.

One last three

The bottom right corner of the card has one more threesome: you, me and others.

It’s not about history.

It’s about today.

The question marks are for us to consider.

How is God inviting us to become part of the *all* people for *all* times?

Is God using

- An angel to invite us?
- Something in nature to capture our attention?
- Stories in Sacred Scripture to inform and inspire us?

Oh, is God inviting you and me to invite and inspire others to center their lives on Jesus?

As we ponder those questions let me offer the simple prayer for us for *all* times:

May we all bless, praise and exalt the Lord!

