

Tuesday, January 6<sup>th</sup> is the day the church universal celebrates the Epiphany. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning manifestation. The church believes that Christ's significance to the wide world was made apparent (manifest) first when three wise men came traveling far across the dusty desert, following a moving star, in search of a newborn king. So Epiphany Sunday commemorates the travels of the wise men and the significance of newborn hope for the whole wide world.

Was newborn hope ever a more needed commodity, more worthy of searching out, than it is now? 2008 was a year that saw wars continue, an economic crisis heighten, and the hopes of many strained to the breaking point. What do we do in the face of the catastrophic human need that these events represent? How do we find newborn hope? Maybe the story of the wise desert travelers has something to teach us about seeking (and finding) hope.

Here's what they did: first, they went out looking for the great God-given goodness they believed existed. It's always easier to stay where we are, despairing, and fortifying our own positions. But sometimes finding new hope requires that we venture out in faith. Perhaps this year's calamities have left you a little disoriented, maybe even devastated. Maybe that's your cue to move ahead. Maybe you'll need to risk a change or two in your life to discover the newborn hope you long to find.

Second, the wise men of so long ago brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are awfully strange gifts for a baby, surely. But, they were the most wonderful, valuable things the kings possessed. What are your most valuable gifts? When you go out in search of new hope, bring your best gifts, and prepare to give them away. Perhaps your desire for hope in the wake of the recent events will spur you to give your best to others, to make a difference. If so, you'll be surprised how offering your time, your financial resources, or your love and prayers can not only benefit those who receive these gifts from you, but can benefit you, too. Your reward will be in feeling far more hopeful, useful, and valuable because of what you've been able to give. So, if you're looking for hope, bring your best to the situation and give it away!

Finally, we are told that the wise men of long ago, after finding the holy child, returned to their own country, but by another road. They went home another way. Well, when you go out in search of newborn hope, and find it, you can hardly expect to carry on with business as usual. You're likely to change the paths you follow. And that's a final gift of seeking newborn hope in the aftermath of tragedy. New hope can reorient us and redirect us.

The year 2008 demonstrated to us that we humans are never truly the ultimate masters of our destiny. But, if we're as wise as the ancient ones who followed the star two thousand years ago, we won't be defeated by that realization. Instead, we'll look for God to shine a star of guidance and lead us toward newborn hope, where in giving we receive, and are directed to new and better paths. May you be wise this Epiphany season!