

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

1st Sunday after the Epiphany B; 01.07.24; G. Miles Smith+

Christmas is over. The last day of *Christmastide* was this past Friday. Most folks may now have their Christmas decorations packed away in their closets, basements, or attics. Our memories of Christmases are now mostly tucked away in our minds...to visit again at the next Christmas. And we are moving on with life as we know it.

For me, having been sick throughout Christmastide, I feel like I pretty much missed Christmas altogether, since I was not able to be with you here, nor able to visit my family in NC as planned. I have never had an experience like that before. But Jennifer, our puppy Sunday, our cat Helen, and I...did have our little Christmas time, with our Christmas tree and decorations and Christmas food and presents and it was nice and intimate. *And now that's over too.*

Perhaps there is still a lot of the child in me which makes me reluctant to leave behind the tangible signs of Christmas. But perhaps it is necessary...to be able to leave Christmas behind...in order to have the chance to realize...that *Christmas is never actually over.* And so it may be possible...that leaving Christmas behind...as we also have to do together in our worship...can be how we may see...what always remains.

To see *what always remains* after such high holy days is not obvious. Every time we leave the Christmas season behind, there remains the *dissonance* between *our experience of God in church*...and *our experience of the world*. The news never stops. And neither does our *personal* news. But neither does the reality of God.

And so, today, I'm especially thinking about the last of the holy mysteries surrounding the Nativity—the story of the visitation of the magi to the Christ child. And I am wondering how this story--as strange as it is--may nevertheless continue to be true today:

What if there really was a world...in which the stars above were not just brute physical realities of matter and energy...but also in their vast beauty communicating something to us of the vast Being of God?

What if there really was a world...in which completely unfamiliar and unexpected strangers...may come into our lives, bearing gifts to be discovered?

What if there really was a world...in which our dreams and imagination...are not just psychological processes of the unconscious mind...but sometimes could also be messengers of God?

What if there really was a world...in which even in the world's many dark and dangerous obsessions...there still are ceaseless signs of the glory of God?

What if...that world...is this world...now.

This year, I am especially keeping my eyes open...for the glory of God...in the life that is already around us.

Until the heavens someday are opened to us...and history itself runs its course and finds its ultimate home and healing in God...until then...*this is it*. This life now is where God already is for us, even if seen only in a “glass darkly,” until we see “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13).

And even when it may not seem like it...we are all part of a *great journey together*... in sin and in goodness...in sickness and in health. It is not so unlike the magi...except for our getting lost from time to time. But maybe the magi did too. But still seeking, they were. And still seeking—we are too.