

## From The Pastor

I extend to you, on behalf of our staff, a very blessed, happy, and holy New Year. May the passage of the years only serve to enrich us in the love we seek in God through Jesus. Time has a mystery all its own that reveals the meaning and character only we can give to it. Time is a precious gift, yet never waits for opportunities missed. Everyday matters because everyday we have an opportunity to share the best of ourselves with others. Time seems so limited, yet what we filled it with often has a lasting effect. In the gift of the New Year, let us fill our days with the light and peace that is in our hearts. Let the love and goodness that is in you leak out and touch as many others as possible. You will be happier and the world will be better for it.

I am most grateful for so many of you who shared cards, gifts, and goodies with me. Your kindness and support is most endearing and happily received. I appreciate your goodness. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Our worship this time of year is filled to the brim with many themes of the mysteries of God. As noted, with Christmas at the end of the week, we are pressed to ingest too quickly the richness of the season; maybe not unlike all the seasonal goodies we are now enjoying.

This weekend we honor Mary, as Mother of God on January 1<sup>st</sup>. To honor Mary is to honor God. Mary reflects the honor and dignity that God holds for each of us. She teaches us how to embrace our lowliness before the Lord. This humility is stirred in her by the humility of God. God becomes lowly and humble in surrendering to our human condition. What an example Mary is to us in our place before God; highly favored, yet rightfully humble. For all the authority, control, and importance we seek for ourselves, the reality is that we are humble creatures before the Creator who made us. Mary, as a woman and a mother shows us how to align ourselves effectively to God.

Many years ago, Pope Paul VI named January 1<sup>st</sup> a world day of prayer for world peace. Time has not lessened the necessity of this prayer. In all our lowliness before God, we have the power to pray from our hearts to God's ear. Peace is the fruit of justice, and all of us have the capacity to bring justice to the world. Find peace within yourself, and be an instrument of peace for the world. Your prayer, and the way you live in love matters.

The feast of Epiphany is at the heart of Christmas. For many years, Epiphany *was* the feast of Christmas in the revelation of the divine identity and mission of the newborn child. Christmas is too rich to take in all at once. Now we celebrate each mystery as it is revealed.

Christmas day celebrates the Incarnation of God in the flesh. God has completely rooted himself in the human condition and the world. Epiphany celebrates the revelation of the divinity of the child and the anticipated promise of redemption. As a whole, the revelation of Jesus includes his birth, Epiphany, and his baptism. This is quickly followed by the miracle of the water turned wine at the wedding feast in Cana to confirm the wedding between God and ourselves and the new wine that is Jesus in the world.

The Three Kings are themselves agents of revelation. They are Gentiles from the farthest corners of the world revealing the universal and inclusive nature of God's salvation. These travelers are seekers of truth. As ones who see the light, they obey the longing of their hearts and are rewarded with the fulfillment of their desire. We should be so blest with such longings.

The gospel holds the tension of God's plan for the world. The Three Kings are met with suspicion and fear by Herod, who stands in darkness against the light of God. Fearful of losing his power, Herod seeks to destroy the child to be born. Even as a child, some come to Jesus with longing acceptance, while others hold fearful rejection. This acceptance-rejection is only to serve as a forbearance of what his adult life will bring.

The consolation for us in these days is the gift of our faith. In a troubled and darkened world, it is not easy to hold faith against the ways of pleasure, power, and wealth. On the other hand, we are richly blest in the surety of the truth of God revealed in Christ Jesus. In the end, our lives will be measured by our love. Power, pleasure, and wealth will not save us from death, or the illnesses and pains of life. Love gives us meaning and purpose that leads to the fruit of joy. Truth in love is a steady rock upon which we can stand when the waters rise and the winds blow strong against us.

I love that the Wise Men were seekers. They perceived the tension of God in their hearts and they followed. The journey could not have been easy. With the familiar comforts of home left behind, they set forth with full hearts and steady purpose. Their struggles were rewarded by the light of the Savior, and they travel home with hearts full of joy and promise.

Let it be the same for us. Let us be seekers of the truth in love so that our hearts will be full and sure. Each of us can be a revelation of God by the way we share ourselves in love. The world could be a much brighter and better place next year at this time if we all do our part to share the light and love that is within us. Be your best self in love.

Father John Esper