

Epiphany Year A
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May the Force be with You

One of my early childhood memories was going to my first drive-in movie with my parents and brother. We had a Ford station wagon - one of those 1970s vehicles with the third row that folded down to be used as extra space for luggage. Or in the case of my family and many others, extra space for kids. So, there we were, my brother and I in our pajamas, curled up in the back with our sleeping bags, pillows and stuffed animals - my parents vain attempt to get us to fall asleep during the movie. According to our shared recollection, we were both mesmerized. There was no falling asleep. Millions of stars were set within the backdrop of a jet, black sky while the opening words of the epic tale slowly crawling across the screen- *In a galaxy far, far away...*All with the sounds of John William's theme song swelling in the background. I still get goosebumps when I hear those chords and watch that opening scene. The adventures of Luke and Leia Skywalker, Han Solo and R2D2 have been a part of my life as long as I can remember. And the newest generation of Star Wars heroines and villains have captured the imaginations of kids and adults alike so many decades later.

In an interview after the release of his 1977 classic, George Lucas stated that his vision for Star Wars was to inspire belief, *"I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery."* This great mystery, THE FORCE, as described by Obi Wan Kenobi to Luke, *"is an energy field, created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together."* Whenever a Jedi attempts to explain the Force, they don't say a whole lot. It's more of a feeling. A sense of connectedness. An experience. The Force isn't primarily known through a theory. Rather, it is known by participating in a story that is bigger than ourselves.

We can say the same holds true for us here as we celebrate the journey of the Magi, grappling as they did with the mystery that God has come among us in the flesh. They left the comfort and safety of all they knew to set out an adventure into the great unknown. They were men whose intellect and influence made them powerful. And in this moment, they were willing give it all up in order to become to risk-takers, explorers open to being humbled by a mystery they could not begin to comprehend. We've been told that the Magi were the most unlikely sort of people to make the journey to Bethlehem. I assert that the opposite is true - that they were exactly the sort of people

who could make this kind of journey. As astronomers they understood that the world was bigger than themselves. That there were discoveries just beyond their reach. Galaxies waiting to be explored. Mysteries beyond their understanding. When they did finally arrive at the stable and gaze upon Jesus, they were able to put away all their theories and fall upon their knees.

We human beings have always had a thirst for knowledge. And, as technology has advanced, we want more and more knowledge within our grasp at all times. We want to be able to Google something and get an answer instantaneously. For us Christians it's no different with our relationship to God. We want to know things about God. We want to figure out exactly how God works or what God has in store for us. We have come up with theories about this God of ours born in a stable. We've written them down. Used them in worship. Argued about them and shed blood over them. Ultimately, all our intellectual assertions of the divine fall short. Because our God isn't composed of a series of facts or arguments, easily digestible. Coming into God's presence isn't like downloading a set of search results. It's more like entering George Lucas' world he created through Star Wars. Being enveloped in that far reaching universe shimmering with innumerable stars. Shivering with goosebumps, we hold on tight and hang on for the ride.

A former Bishop of mine once said, "It seems to me that the Christian life is about being drawn deeper and deeper into the wondrous mystery of the love of Christ until, one day, we are drawn into it completely. Discerning what God is calling us to do is about choosing the path that draws us into wonder and mystery. I have found that path invariably to be the one of greatest challenge, and not infrequently, one of greatest adventure." The Magi teach us that at the heart of our faith is an overwhelming sense awe which no human words can articulate fully. We are being led on an adventure that is bigger than ourselves, bigger than our theories, bigger than our hopes and fears, and bigger than our need to be right and to know everything. In the end it is our participation in God's story where we come to know the mystery of divine love.

The Magi's story within God's story ends with them returning home by another road. The journey has changed them. Transformed by what they had discovered through the star, they must begin anew. Another road awaits them with the light shining from within each of their hearts. It's the first Sunday of a new year, a time to start fresh, maybe to embark on a new road, eager to discover those places in which we can experience that same awe and wonder. The Magi's invitation involves a different kind of new year's resolution. To cultivate the heart of an explorer, worrying less about creating the map that will get us to our destination and focusing more on what's right in front of us. Putting one foot in front of the other, unsure of where each step will lead us. Yet, believing that this life, and this road, is given to us for a reason. The path that will be utterly unique to

each of us, but all safe in the heart of God. We set out after own star and discover we need not know everything to follow its light. We need only to trust the invitation and the One beckoning us to the journey.

May the force be with you. *Amen.*