

## **EPIPHANY: January 6, 2022**

An angel appears to Joseph of Nazareth and comforts him in his anxiety. Joseph gets direction. Joseph learns that he has a special role to play in his lifetime. In spite of the scandal of this child's conception, Joseph commits himself to care for this young, pregnant woman with whom he has fallen in love. Joseph is present at this child's birth. Joseph names this child as the angel told him to do. Joseph believes that the infant Jesus also has a unique role to play in bringing Human Beings into a right relationship with the Creator of the Universe and the Great Spirit which moves across the face of the deep. For Joseph and Mary, this vulnerable infant will grow into a unique sign that the Lord God Almighty is with us whatever our circumstances.

### **Read Matthew 2:1-12. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?**

As in every age, Human Beings celebrated the wonders of new life in this creation, were aware of the ongoing work of finding the means to survive from the gifts of creation, and also knew the importance of being part of caring communities committed to sharing the gifts of the Creator who continued to bring new life into being. About two millennium ago, learned Human Beings pondered the complexities of life and studied the stars in the night skies in order to gain wisdom and direction. Separately, each of these Knowledge Keepers observed the appearance of a new star in the night skies and gathered together to ponder the meaning of this amazing event. These Magi were filled with wonder. In sifting through the wisdom of their respective cultures and spiritual practices, their search led them to conclude that a unique Human Being was coming into this world and that this Child would accomplish what no other human being had been capable of doing. These Magi made the decision to journey westward following this star to find the birthplace of this unique Human Being.

There is much good news in this gospel story. We do not know much about these Magi and their respective journeys westward. What if each of these Knowledge Keepers speak different languages and live among different Peoples? What if each of these scholars share the same passion for justice and the end of suffering experienced by Human Beings in every place on this planet? What if each one of these curious individuals examines the wonders of creation believing in the power of love and the inherent goodness of each Human Being? What if these Magi maintain a right relationship with a generous Creator who offers Human Beings all that we need to live and make choices which benefit the common good. What if each of the Magi know the strength that comes from living within communities which affirm her members in the work of caring for each other? What if the Magi believe that Creator will send a unique Human Being into the world to put an end to injustice and suffering so that a new age will begin for all.

In drawing near to the end of their journey near the eastern shores of what we know as the Mediterranean Sea, these Magi seek out the Ruler of the twelve tribes of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. King Herod did not share the same sense of awe and wonder about the presence of a bright star in the night skies coming to the end of its journey overhead in this part of the world. King Herod and much of the people living in the city of Jerusalem were frightened. In this gospel story, no one had pondered the meaning of this unusual astronomical occurrence which was plain for anyone to see if one looked up into the night skies. King Herod calls the religious and political authorities together to find out from the wealth of knowledge and wisdom of the Hebrew People when and where the Messiah was expected to come into this world. These scholars and religious leaders acknowledge that Creator will raise up a unique Human Being to usher a new age into being in which justice is established and suffering put to an end as the prophets spoke in ages past. These scholars and religious leaders point to Bethlehem as the birthplace of this Messiah. The Magi listen to King Herod as he tells them where to find the One whom they seek but the Magi do not trust his words that he too wants to honour this One whom Creator is sending into the world.

On the last part of their journey in following the bright star in the night skies, the Magi are filled with awe and wonder with each step out of Jerusalem and towards Bethlehem. The Magi find the child, look into the face of this infant, pick

up this gift from Creator with all of the vulnerabilities of newborn child, hold this precious One, and to listen to the sounds which all babies make. To honour Creator's amazing gift to all in creation, each Magi offers a gift: one of gold, a second of frankincense, and the third of myrrh.

In their sleep, Creator confirms that their next steps do not include a return to Jerusalem and King Herod's court but a journey back to their own Peoples on their own part of creation.

### **Reread Matthew 2: 1-12. What is God saying to us?**

During the past year, ground penetrating radar identified unmarked graves of children and youth who went to residential schools from coast to coast to coast but did not return to their families and Indigenous communities. The need for non-Indigenous Settlers and Newcomers to acknowledge the truth about the tragic history of relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the waves of immigrants who arrived to inhabit these lands and waters in this part of the planet is evident. Members of Indigenous Peoples continue to speak about their experiences of dispossession of the lands and waters which Creator entrusted to their care for thousands of years, exposure to diseases, exploitation of the resources of the lands, waters and forests, attempts of the erasure of their languages, knowledge, cultural heritage, and spiritual practices, exposure to diseases, and ongoing governmental policies which perpetuate poverty and racism. Much work still needs to be done in addressing the harm which has happened over the past 500 years, preventing further trauma to Indigenous Peoples, and rebuilding right relationships in moving forward together.

In November 2021, Bishop Lydia Mamakwa launched Advent Conspiracy 2021 speaking from the Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh in the remote areas of northwestern Ontario and northeaster Manitoba on the traditional territories of Kingfisher Lake First Nation. Bishop Lydia expressed appreciation of the work of Pimatisiwin Nipi and the leadership of the Anglican Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald in providing hope to Indigenous communities. Over the years, Pimatisiwin Nipi raised funds so that safe, clean water was available in homes of vulnerable members of Pikangikum First Nation and that young Indigenous adults chosen by their communities were trained through an internship program by the NGO WATER FIRST over a period of fifteen months to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience in monitoring the quality of water provided by water treatment plants and from their local watershed. Bishop Lydia recounted how she learned from her parents as a child how to obtain water for drinking and cooking on their traditional territories and noted that boil water advisories have become more commonplace in the past 30 years. Following the Anglican Primate Ted Scott's Inquiry, the federal government brought contractors to build water treatment plants in Indigenous communities in the 1990's. Kingfisher Lake First Nation was one of these Indigenous communities who benefitted from the construction of their first water treatment plant. About half of the community received safe, clean water through a distribution pipeline system while the other half received water delivered by tanker trucks. In 2009, a new water treatment plant was completed with involvement from members of Kingfisher Lake First Nation. However, about half of the community continued to need tanker trucks for water delivery due to the amount of blasting bedrock which would be needed to supply the other half of the community with waterlines protected from the cold winter temperatures. As Bishop Lydia explained, occasional closing of the water treatment plants and breakdowns with the water tanker trucks causes difficulties for the community and much extra work to get safe, clean water to homes, the school, health services, and band offices. Replacement parts can be brought into this remote community by ice road for about two months in the winter or need to be transported by plane and are costly. Arrangements for skilled mechanics to be flown into Kingfisher Lake take time and are expensive. Many of these remote Indigenous communities rely on water tanker trucks, a supply of parts, and skilled mechanics to operate and bring safe, clean water to homes. Bishop Lydia looks forward to developing a working relationship with Pimatisiwin Nipi. The Trinity Endowment Fund committed \$2,000 for Pimatisiwin Nipi at Vestry in October 2021. In November and December 2021, members of Trinity Anglican Church in Aurora generously contributed to the Mishamikoweesh Water Partnership through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, raising \$4,530. Information from other Anglican Churches in the southern parts of Ontario who support Pimatisiwin Nipi is not yet available.

In Bearskin Lake First Nation located further north of Kingfisher Lake and a member of the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh, the Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus spread quickly. In December 2021, about 80% of this Indigenous community was fully vaccinated and pediatric vaccinations had started to be administered just before Christmas. However, almost half of the 400 residents had tested positive in mid December 2021 and were under quarantine. Chief Lefty Kemenawatawin and Council declared a State of Emergency. The Minister of Indigenous Services Patty Hajdu arranged for \$1 Million to be available for additional health care workers, supplies, and payment for transportation by air for Bearskin Lake First Nation. On January 3, 2022, the Chief and Council requested by letter that the federal government send 40 members of the Canadian Armed Forces to help. There is no hospital in Bearskin Lake First Nation and the six nurses at the health care clinic had become exhausted. Almost all of the homes are heated by wood burning stoves or furnaces so a great deal of wood needs to be split in order to survive the cold temperatures. Both Pikangikum First Nation and Sandy Lake First Nation sent planes loaded with food and supplies to help. Snowmobile convoys from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (Big Trout Lake First Nation) brought food, supplies, and wood along a trail, travelling over three hours in minus 40°C temperatures to Bearskin Lake First Nation. Snowmobilers also checked on homes with those in quarantine and managing the Omicron symptoms. A mother of three adult children Tania Cameron in Sioux Lookout sent almost \$20,000 worth of food, air purifiers, and a donated new wood splitter to Bearskin Lake. Roy Fiddler organized volunteers from Muskrat Dam First Nation to send twelve truckloads of split wood by road travelling about two hours to get to Bearskin Lake. People in Thunder Bay gathered food and supplies so this support could be sent to Bearskin Lake. On January 9, 2022, three members of the Canadian Armed Forces Rangers from Camp Borden arrived to support the three other Rangers who lived at Bearskin Lake First Nation to check on residents, deliver food, split wood, and provide security in the community as well as to assess what further support will be needed from the Canadian Armed Forces. The Grand Chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Derek Fox who is also a member of Bearskin Lake First Nation pointed out in a CBC interview that responses by federal and provincial governments would have been more timely if about half of the population of Toronto was positive for Covid-19.

### **Reread Matthew 12:1-12. What is God asking us to be and do?**

Pray for the members of Bearskin Lake First Nation, particularly those who are positive for Covid-19, the Chief and Council, and members of St. Peter's Anglican Church.

Pray for the National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald and Bishop Lydia Mamakwa in providing spiritual support for those who live in the Indigenous Ministry of Mishamikoweesh during these challenging times.

Pray for the members of Pimatisiwin Nipi in developing a working relationship with Bishop Lydia Mamakwa and the leadership of the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh.

On the Bruce Peninsula with the Lutheran and Anglican Mission of the Bruce Peninsula, register with the Office Administrator Charlotte Ewbank by email at [bruceparish@bmts.com](mailto:bruceparish@bmts.com) to participate in six Lenten Talking Circles on Wednesdays in Lent starting on Ash Wednesday, March 2. The exact time has yet to be determined. The first six chapters in the booklet LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS VOICES published by the Jesuit Forum in 2021 will be used as a resource. Extra copies of this booklet are available at the LAAMB office.

In the Aurora/Newmarket area, register with the Reverend David Franks by email at [davidapfranks@gmail.com](mailto:davidapfranks@gmail.com) or call me at 905-715-9997. Dates and times for five Talking Circles during Lent 2022 have yet to be determined. Jake Charles from the Chippewas of Georgina Island is available to be our Indigenous Participant. The first five chapters of LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS VOICES will guide our exploration about what we need to learn and what we can do to establish right relationships with Indigenous Peoples.