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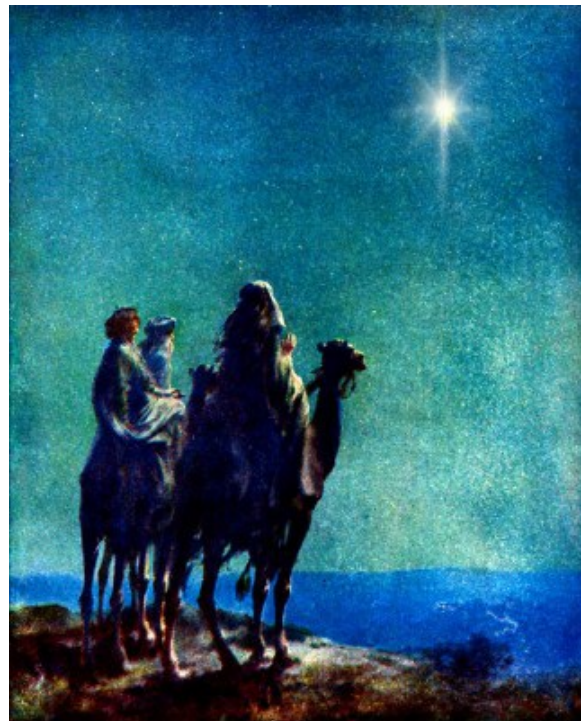
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OUR PIUS UPDATE
JANUARY 4, 2022



UNIQUE TRAILBLAZERS

The word “**trailblazer**” immediately conjures up images of people who are admired for their vision, courage, and determination to reach their goal. Among a long list is **Amelia Earhart**, the first female aviator who flew solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Then there is *Jane Goodall*, an English primatologist and anthropologist, who is considered the world’s expert on chimpanzees.

Reflecting on the Old Testament’s trailblazers, **Ruth** shines forth as one who left her people to follow **Naomi** to Bethlehem, and faced trials with great calm.

Undoubtedly, the **Magi** in **Matthew’s Gospel** can be considered the New Testament trailblazers. They followed a star in search of the Christ Child, and at the end of their very long journey, they discovered God. These “*wise men from the East*” occupy just 12 verses in Matthew’s Gospel, yet they are a vital part of every Nativity scene.

As a child, I fondly remember helping to set up the crib at the entrance of our home before Christmas. The three “**kings**” were placed at a distance, and inched forward as the Christmas season rolled along, till the **Feast of the Epiphany, January 6th**.

Later on, I discovered that nowhere in Scripture does it say that the magi were kings. Perhaps that came about because of Christians reflecting on *Psalm 72: 10-11* “*The king of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him.*” Or maybe the Christmas carol that we sing with great gusto, *We Three Kings of Orient Are*, has influenced our thinking. The gifts they brought, gold, frankincense, and myrrh were after all, fit to honor a king.

The magi, astrologers, part of a star gazing culture in Babylon/Persia were dedicated to discern the will of God. They captured the imagination of T.S. Eliot, who in his three-stanza poem “**The Journey of the Magi**” vividly describes the difficult path they traveled to encounter the Christ child – freezing weather, limited food and shelter, rejection from every town, and suffering camels. To them, “**this was all folly.**” Their meeting was just “**satisfactory,**” but it was only on their return, that they discovered that they were “*no longer at ease.*” They had changed, because they had seen the true God.

We are spiritual seekers, and God can be found by those who search for him. The magi, magoi an ancient Greek word, were pilgrim non-Jewish believers, “*the first fruit of the Gentiles*” according to St. Augustine. Artists, way back at the beginning of the second century, already depicted the adoration of the magi in the Roman catacombs. Christmas cards often have pictures of the magi sitting on camels, walking through desert landscape, but always following a star. The three mysterious figures are in a sense, role models for our own inner journey to God.

God’s guidance, that’s what the magi needed. Their quest led them to King Herod in Jerusalem enquiring, “*Where is the new born king of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.*” (Matthew 2:2) Interestingly, once these astrologers received Israelite revelation, that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, they met him “*in straw poverty,*” as Bishop Barron said.

These wise men are to be admired, because they began a journey that took them over rugged terrain, yet they persevered on their adventure into the unknown. The puzzling star beckoned, and they followed. Their example challenges us to get out of our comfort zone, and be willing to answer God’s call wherever that may lead us.

When the magi discovered the Messiah, they dropped to their knees in adoration. Unlike the simple, humble shepherds of Luke’s Gospel, these were learned men whose joy overflowed, when recognizing God in the tiny baby lying in a manger. St. Bernard of Clairvaux says it best, “They fall on their faces, they revere him as king, they

worship him as God. He who led them has instructed them too. He who urged them on by means of the star has himself taught them in their inmost heart.”

How amazing it is, that the magi depicted in art as dressed in Persian fashion – caps, trousers, and belted tunics with long sleeves, blazed a trail to Jesus, the light of the world.

So, we sing with enthusiasm,

*“O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to the perfect Light.”*

GOING HOME BY ANOTHER WAY



Reflect

Following their dream, the Magi are said to have *"left for their own country by another road."* Often, like the Magi, we have to change course and alter plans to accommodate new insights. Taking another route may appear inconvenient. But the new route may provide new insights, experiences, and opportunities to serve.

Pray

God of familiarity and change,
open my spirit to new directions.
Open my mind to new possibilities.
Help me to embrace with courage and patience
new plans and changes in course,
knowing that you are my companion every step of the way.

Amen.

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON



Mother Seton is one of the keystones of the American Catholic Church. She founded the first American religious community for women, the **Sisters of Charity**. She opened the first American parish school and established the first American Catholic orphanage. All this she did in the span of 46 years while raising her five children.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton is a true daughter of the American Revolution, born **August 28, 1774**, just two years before the Declaration of Independence. By birth and marriage, she was linked to the first families of New York and enjoyed the fruits of high society. Reared a staunch Episcopalian, she learned the value of prayer, Scripture and a nightly examination of conscience. Her father, Dr. Richard Bayley, did not have much use for churches but was a great humanitarian, teaching his daughter to love and serve others.

The early deaths of her mother in 1777 and her baby sister in 1778 gave Elizabeth a feel for eternity and the temporariness of the pilgrim life on earth. Far from being brooding and sullen, she faced each new "*holocaust*," as she put it, with hopeful cheerfulness.

At 19, Elizabeth was the belle of New York and married a handsome, wealthy businessman, William Magee Seton. They had five children before his business failed and he died of tuberculosis. At 30, Elizabeth was widowed and penniless, with five small children to support.

While in Italy with her dying husband, Elizabeth witnessed Catholicity in action through family friends. Three basic points led her to become a Catholic: belief in the Real Presence, devotion to the Blessed Mother and conviction that the Catholic Church led back to the apostles and to Christ. Many of her family and friends rejected her when she became a Catholic in March 1805.

To support her children, she opened a school in Baltimore. From the beginning, her group followed the lines of a religious community, which was officially founded in 1809.

The thousand or more letters of Mother Seton reveal the development of her spiritual life from ordinary goodness to heroic sanctity. She suffered great trials of sickness, misunderstanding, the death of loved ones (her husband and two young daughters) and the heartache of a wayward son. She **died January 4, 1821**, and became the **first American-born citizen** to be **beatified (1963)** and then **canonized (1975)**. She is buried in *Emmitsburg, Maryland*.

REFLECTION

Elizabeth Ann Seton had no extraordinary gifts. She was not a mystic or stigmatic. She did not prophesy or speak in tongues. She had two great devotions: abandonment to the will of God and an ardent love for the Blessed Sacrament. She wrote to a friend, Julia Scott, that she would prefer to exchange the world for a "cave or a desert." "But God has given me a great deal to do, and I have always and hope always to prefer his will to every wish of my own." Her brand of sanctity is open to everyone if we love God and do his will.

SOURCE: Franciscan Media

TO BE LOVED

It's easy for me to love. It is what I do. Raising eight souls and being married 24 years has given me plenty of opportunities to grow in the knowledge of how to love. Those who are loved by acts of service, I've got your gas tank filled up for you. Physical touch? Let Mommy rub your shoulders. Gifts? Here's a special package mailed to your dorm room. For the one who needs to be affirmed and connected, there is a note placed on top of your pillow -- and special time is a coveted but precious phrase in our home. Those that are blessed with it bloom under its umbrella. At times, we have all felt loved by these efforts but for me, the doing has always been easier.

I find myself in a season of needing to receive love, and it is formative. There have been multiple times in the story of this incredible family of mine where charity has been needed, and oh, the stories of generosity and kindness have formed the backbone of who we are as a family. But I have come to realize that my openness to that charity and love was always for my family. They were (and continue to be) always worthy, but it was for them that the charity was received.

I sent a text the other day to a good friend on my way back from a hard appointment. In it, I laid out the details of upcoming medical care. When I would be home and when I would not. This friend, so busy with a thriving life of her own, responded, "*I will be there with your children.*" I sat there in the car, as my husband drove me home, holding the phone and reading that message. I will be there. I sat in awe of that fact that she so loved me that she would stop her world; that I was so much a part of her world, that she would do that for me. Not for my children, not for my husband, but for me.

I was worthy.

It's a tricky thing, being loved. I have been married twenty-four years and even now there are days where I ask my husband, "*Really, me?*" Steadfast and true, he responds, "*Always, you.*" I received a letter the other day from my children's surgeon. I have spent fifteen years, walking with this man, showing him Jesus along the journey. I have been so grateful for the friendship that has grown. His letter, so woven with care and love for me, left me weeping. In it, he spoke of who I am. He spoke in words that said he knew me, my strengths and weaknesses, and loved me. I was fully known and loved.

Receiving love is more challenging than giving love. That is why God became man: to show us how to receive.

I'm in a place of pondering love. Not romantic love, but abiding love. I am reeling from the deep and steadfast love that is being laid before me in a time of need. From male and female, child and senior, love is being given to me. Love is slowing me down with its sheer radiance. At moments, I feel like Peter or John at the Transfiguration, almost blinded by the sheer brilliance of it. It is palpable.

There is no avoiding being loved like this. A dear priest friend shared with me that receiving love is more challenging than giving love. That is why God became man: to show us how to receive. This has been my reflection day and night that I may live in that humility.

I know I am not alone this season, when receiving love is a necessity. It is also an opportunity I don't want to let pass by, for I know this is sacred time. This dependency on the Father's love, walking forward in faith and trust. The Lord works through us in our weakness. When we allow ourselves to be supple to his working within us, our strength becomes His light shining from within and welcomes others in. Love speaks, welcomes, gives, and frees us in our deepest moments.

This season, may we welcome love in all its brilliance and receive it as the brilliant gift it is.

SOURCE: MaryBeth Eberhard, www.catholicmom.com

CHANGE AND GROW

**I RELEASE ALL THE THINGS FROM THE PAST
YEAR THAT HAS CAUSED ANY NEGATIVE
ATTACHMENT .**

**I PREPARE AND WELCOME NEW CHANGES ,
NEW LESSONS AND NEW ADVENTURES . I
WELCOME NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW
EMOTIONALLY , MENTALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.**



SPEAK LORD IN SILENCE

When there is just
too much noise
Speak, Lord, in silence

When we are distracted by
so much news
Speak, Lord, in silence

When we cannot focus
on a way forward
Speak, Lord, in silence

Come to us in stillness and calm
Quiet our confusion and doubt
Speak, Lord, in silence

Amen

SOURCE: Anonymous