

Epiphany

January 8, 2023

St. Patrick

So the first words of the Magi in our Epiphany Gospel: **“Where is the newborn King of the Jews?”**

Searching long and hard, the Magi didn't abandon their search, even when their leads went cold. We too ache not only to find the Christ, but to know him.

Where, indeed?

It was a frigid Epiphany Sunday in 1982. It was my first Christmas season as a new pastor at St. John's Church on Lamar Avenue in the city. After the 8:00 a.m. Mass (everyone else having made their departure), hobbling down the main aisle came Leon Barthol, at that time well into his seventies, with a cane in one hand and, beside his wife of more than 55 years, Stella. On that Epiphany Sunday there a couple of their grown children, and a large assortment of grandchildren, surrounded Leon and Stella. Leon, a master wood craftsman--clearly the finest in the mid-South--had hand-carved all the sanctuary furniture at St. John's. With an unruly beard and bushy eyebrows which highlighted the glow of his eyes, Leon mischievously asked: “Father, would you bless this for us?”

Opening his cane-less hand, he held a single piece of chalk. “Father, would you bless the chalk?”

We then went to their home, and over the main doorway, Leon etched with the chalk: C B M, with a small cross between the B and the M, a little lower. He also wrote the year above the doorway.

Standing on his chair, Leon taught his grandchildren: “Who knows how Jesus will show forth his glory this year? Remember when God became flesh, coming as a small baby? Herod missed him. Most folks missed him. Yes...CBM, a reminder and a prayer, that we might show hospitality to *all* who come into our lives this year. It might be the Christ for whom we are searching.”

C B M -- Whoever might come through *our* doors...at our homes, through the front entrance of the church, or the entrance of our Outreach Center. It could be a

stranger. It might be a family member--one closest to us--who might be the Christ, and we've failed to see the light.

“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come; the glory of the Lord shines upon you.”

Leon was right. Herod and most of Jerusalem didn't welcome the infant Christ; most didn't accept him. The third stained-glass window on our left side depicts Joseph and Mary—she holding the infant Jesus—making the arduous journey as refugees to Egypt. Ah, yes, at all the borders of our nation we need to put this same message, etched with chalk. Immigrants and refugees in our time might be the Christ we're looking for. Indeed, the Holy Family became refugees, fearing for their son's life.

CBM...2023. Leon Barthol's custom—a centuries-old Epiphany tradition especially in Eastern Europe—it's not an empty gesture. Epiphany means “to show forth.” Who knows how God will “show forth” Jesus' glory this New Year? How, indeed, might the Christ for whom we are searching show forth his presence in our lives, here at St. Patrick's, and in our world?

Etched on our doorways, etched also in our hearts, the message reminds us that Jesus always comes in surprising ways!

General Intercessions
Epiphany 2023

Lead the Church, that we might remain faithful in our search for the Christ and offer him homage by the witness of our lives; we pray to you, O Lord—

Invigorate our Diocese of West Tennessee, on the 52th anniversary of our founding on the Epiphany Feast: that the light of Christ might lead us to be the Good Samaritan on the banks of the Mississippi; we pray to you, O Lord—

Enlighten those who, like the Magi, search for the truth; we pray to you, O Lord—

Strengthen and heal those who suffer from depression and burnout; move us to reach out to all who are suffering from the winter, especially the homeless, the forgotten; as well as immigrants and refugees; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bring all the faithful departed into the fullness of joy in your presence, especially Paz Yolanda Gomez Vida de Torre, (*and for the 8:30 a.m. Mass only--*) and Peggy Pera; we pray to you, O Lord—