

Jan 6, 2010
Epiphany Day
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St James Episcopal Church

I had this fleeting image in my mind of three people, each with an entourage, showing up at my house and how I'd feel about it. I'd worry about the dirty clothes I threw over the landing that I'd scoop up and stash in the laundry room. I would take a quick look through the kitchen to make sure no egregious amount of dirty dishes sat on the counter, waiting to be loaded into the dishwasher. I would see what amount of mail was stashed on the little English chest that stands by the front door, all waiting to be sorted, tossed or filed away. Then I'd check the pantry to see if I had enough snacks to properly entertain them and throw some CDs on the stereo as lovely background music. DO I use the quick clean-up route and put out plastic utensils, paper plates and toss in the garbage cups? Or do I pull out the good stuff, the real dishes, the starched and ironed napkins? Mercy sakes, it takes some serious work to entertain drop-in guests. You can't be ready all the time, with everything at hand and everything perfect.

Gee, I'd like to have an email first, or phone calls, so I can do these things thoughtfully and not arrive breathless at the door, just as you are ringing the doorbell! I'd like to be poised, cleaned up, a fresh shirt and maybe a fresh pair of jeans, tidied up a bit and check the hair...

What a difference all of this makes when cast into the realm of Mary and Joseph who will entertain three guests in a borrowed stable with a newborn infant at hand. And three royal personages arrive with stories and tales and who knows, maybe a translator or three. How comfortable I am in my house with my stuff, and heat and lights and all the comforts of home. How difficult for a mother and father on the road, living in humble and

borrowed accommodations, scrounging for food and suddenly having house guests.

All season we hear about Mary pondering things in her heart. The events of our own days are worth the pondering. Pondering things and keeping them in our hearts when events feel like an out-of-control roller coaster takes some practice.

And most likely, like the visitors from the East we acknowledge today, Jesus will arrive unannounced, whether we've picked up the clothes and tidied up our lives or not. It is into your life and my life, untidy, unkempt, and unorganized, that he comes. And it is the human heart that is the manger where the Christ Child takes up residence.

In the end, it isn't how ready we are to know him, to worship him, to follow him. It isn't about perfection and appearances and being proper. It isn't about being articulate, clever or smart. It is all about being faithful, welcoming the strangers and welcoming the Christ Child when he approaches the door of our hearts.

We will hear stories in the coming weeks about Jesus, stories that will label him as beloved Son, a worker of miracles, a preacher beyond all of us, an interpreter of Holy Writ, a man who controls the weather, God's chosen redeemer of Israel. These are the themes of Epiphany, so we will recognize this man Jesus as the Savior and Redeemer of the world. Then the path to Jerusalem during Lent makes more sense. Then the stories of death and new life have meaning and purpose and direction and hope. Today it starts with us and the strangers in our midst. We are to welcome them and see them not as strangers but as neighbors. They are not an intrusion but a beautiful view of the inclusivity that resides in the heart and mind of God. We, too, are welcomed here, to see the Christ Child.