

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

LOOK

How was the Christmas season for you? Did you find a few moments to sit by the manger? What was that like for you?

BOOK

Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the

star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

- 1) This is a very familiar Christmas story found only in Matthew. Note the details, or lack thereof, in the actual scriptural account. How has this story been embellished over the centuries?
- 2) Define incarnation. (Hint: To take what is abstract and intangible, and make it tangible, able to be seen, touched, experienced physically.) What did Jesus incarnate (embody)? (Hint: as infant, vulnerability, dependence, innocence. As an adult, compassion, justice, healing, inclusion, love).
- 3) Ponder the incarnation: that our infinite God chose to contain Godself in finite, fallible human form; that our all-powerful God chose to become completely dependent and vulnerable. What does this tell us about the nature of our God? What does this tell us about the holiness of being human? (Hint: God blesses our humanity in all its imperfection and messiness and works through it for good.)
- 4) The magi were Gentiles, perhaps Zoroastrians. What does it mean that these foreigners were the ones to find and recognize the Christ?

TOOK

- 1) What does it mean to you to be fully human? How do we shield ourselves from being fully human? What risks do we take when we live deeply and fully? Give a concrete example of being fully human.
- 2) We all will incarnate (embody, live out) something every day. What did Jesus embody in his lifetime? Our choice is what we incarnate: apathy, resignation, or compassion and love. What will you incarnate this moment? This day? This year?
- 3) William Blake wrote: “and we are put on earth a little space, that we might learn to bear the beams of love.” What does bearing the beams of love look like for you? To truly feel and know that God loves you? Or to bear the light of love to others? Can we do the second if we have not done the first?