

The Artist's Almanac – January 2019

Epiphany

– *A sudden manifestation or perception of the essential meaning of something.*

– Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

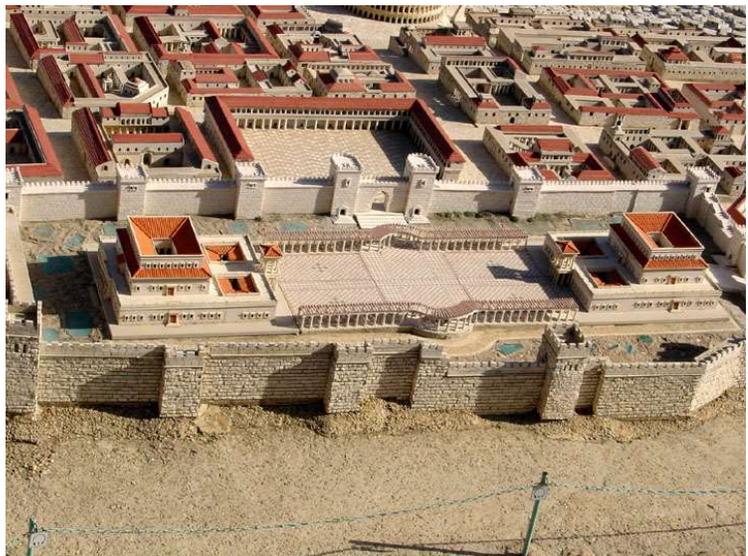
I am at a convention in Puerto Rico several years ago. On the way to our hotel from the airport, here in a strange land, I am shocked by a strange sight. There, towering over me, on the roadside, are three richly dressed men, mounted on huge camels. These are the three wise men, and this is January 6th - Epiphany.

Today the stores in the once crowded mall are closed, for taking inventory, marking down their merchandise. Christmas carols stopped at noon the 25th of December and the lighted star atop Pilot's Knob, the one that so often piloted me back to my home in the dark time, has winked out. The Twelve Days have ended and Christmas is over. Or is it?

We think of January as a lonely, dark, cold time of soon-to-be-forgotten New Year Resolutions and we hope, *better luck this year*. But for now, it's back to everydayness.

These three men represented wisdom, which came here with riches, to worship a child born to a life of itinerant poverty. For this was not just any child, but one prophesied to become king, and that spelled trouble for him. They first went to Herod the Great in his magnificent palace in Jerusalem to ask him, this ruler, the one man who *should know, where may we find the one born to become King of the Jews? We have seen his star rising in the east and come to do him honor.*

They asked the wrong man. Herod, a tyrant so vile, he had murdered his own wife and three of his sons, as possible usurpers to his throne. He was king of the Jews and jealous of any rival. As an observant Jew, Herod ate no pork, prompting Caesar to remark it were better to be Herod's pig than his son. He directed the wise men to return to him right away with news of the child's whereabouts so that he too might go to worship him as well.



Herod's Palace in Jerusalem



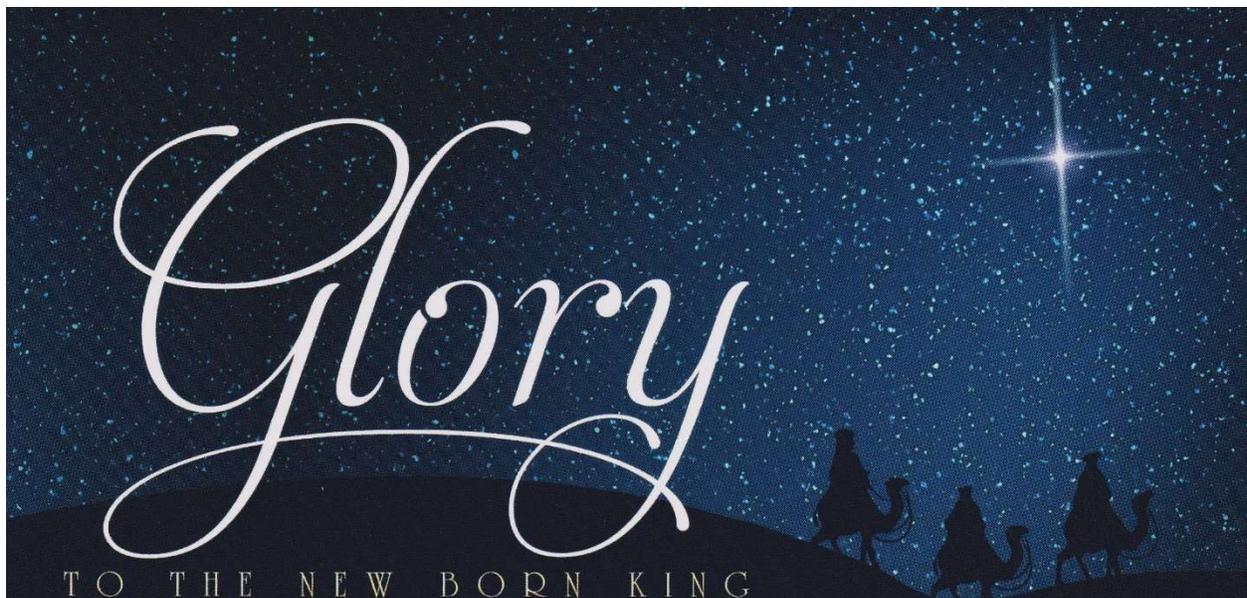
The Adoration of the Shepherds
Philippe de Champaigne

After the wise men found the child with his itinerant parents in a smelly barn in an obscure village, Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, and rendered him honor and their gifts, they were warned in a dream to avoid Herod and return to their home by another way. Herod, furious at being tricked, called his temple priests and asked them where their tradition told them this king was to be born. *Bethlehem, in Judah, according to our prophets.* To a man who murdered his wife and sons the killing of few poor children in a poor village as no problem. He ordered his troops to go directly and put to the sword every male child under two in Bethlehem. They did just that, and these *Holy Innocents* became the first Christian martyrs. Had it not been for these wise men we might have no Christ and no Christmas.

Do we, today, know what we really want, or are we, like the Magi in search of guidance? The men on camels from the East came searching for Wisdom, not knowing where or what it was, guided only by their star. They found it, lying in a strange place, a smelly barn, where an itinerant couple with a son thought by many to be illegitimate, radiated the same light as the star that brought these men here. Instead of reporting this strange event back to the authorities, as they had been instructed, they thus helped the little family to escape to Egypt, thereby avoiding the power of a tyrant who regarded the child as a threat to his own power. The authorities planned to kill him, but did not – or not just yet - though they would one day. Or thought they did.

But so far from bringing death, his death brought light, and life - Eternal Life. The holy infant grew into a man, the Son of God, who told us not to get so caught up in the world's worries and jealousies, but to follow our star, which will lead us surely to Wisdom, Truth, and to Love.

May we each follow His star this New Year, to wherever and whatever He leads us, until we reach our home. And give thanks to three wise men who saved our lives.



For without Epiphany, there would be no Christmas.