

Has anyone here seen pictures of the northern lights—the aurora borealis—or seen them in person? They're amazing, aren't they—whether in photo or live! My only in-person experience of them was several years ago when Stan and I and the kids went camping in northern Maine. One night after a pleasant campfire and toasted marshmallows on the lakeshore, we saw bouncing, pulsating lights in the pitch black distant sky. We didn't know what they were at first, but then realized they were the northern lights. We were so excited as they captivated us with their beauty, color, and movement. This unexpected light show was an unforgettable experience that continues to speak to me to this day.

The light of the star in today's gospel story was part of an unforgettable experience that has been talked about for centuries and continues to speak to us now. The astrologers noticed this light, allowed it to guide them, and journeyed into its revelation. Although they noticed an outward light, it's an inner light that I invite us to reflect on this morning. Let us now walk into this light story of noticing, guiding, and journeying and see what it means for our life.

1<sup>st</sup> is noticing the light. It's one thing to see light. It's quite another to notice its features—its intensity, color, location, shape, or source. Curiosity and a willingness to settle in and reflect help us to see beneath the surface and look more deeply into its meaning. As I scan this room, I see inner lights that are beaming with brilliance. Lights of peace, healing, joy, connection, welcome, love, justice, compassion, teaching, adventure, humor, authenticity, and many others. The source of this light is from the inner soul of each person here in this community. Each of us also has light that begs to be noticed—to be brought to light so to speak—and be developed. I experienced an example of noticing light this past week as I watched an inspiring story of a friendship between University of Alabama's star quarterback AJ McCarron and the equipment manager, also named AJ, who has cerebral palsy. AJ the

equipment manager had been struggling to fit in with his fellow students, but he struck up a friendship with AJ McCarron and asked if he could help the football team. The star quarterback saw beyond his disability, felt his goodness and desire to be part of the team, and was able to get him a job as equipment manager. This meant the world to AJ. AJ McCarron said he felt a responsibility to help AJ however he could. His inner light of compassion and caring joined AJ's inner light—his desire to connect, be accepted, and help others. As I listened to their exchange, I felt the power of their humanity and the power kindness has to touch souls—I know how deeply it touched mine. In the New Year I urge each of us to look into our heart, appreciate the bright light within, and acknowledge and embrace the hidden light that longs to glow.

2<sup>nd</sup> is guidance. The astrologers trusted that the light of the star would guide them somewhere. Likewise we need to *trust* our inner light. Trust is one of those qualities that is easy to talk about but challenging to live. I find this especially true when our inner light is guiding us someplace we haven't been before in a relationship, in work or ministry, or in our personal journey. In 2014 let us continue to cultivate trust in ourselves, in the guidance of our inner light. Let us also surround ourselves with trusting guides, people of light who will help us find our true inner light.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> part is journeying. Here's where the action is! The magi journeyed into the light and found Jesus. They continued to move into the light by listening to their dream and not returning to Herod. The light beckons us forward. It's time to move, to journey into the light, noticing and trusting the light as we walk into it. Sometimes the journey can take a while. Our heart needs to be open to the light, to its challenges, its depth, and whatever else this light reveals. Our heart must be ready to accept the changes this journey may require, whether they be tangible ones such as a change of residence or involvement in an activity or intangibles, a

shift in our beliefs or a change in relationship. Our inner light calls us to keep on journeying and searching for the light that guides us deeper into Love—into God.

To illustrate this noticing, guiding, and journeying, I'd like to share a recent experience at Penn State Abington. A religion professor had invited me to speak to his class about my personal journey of faith. After my presentation we had about 45 minutes of questions. I noticed during the Q & A how engaged and attentive the students were. Their questions reflected an intense listening to my story, a desire for guidance as they navigate their life, and a willingness to journey deeper into the questions of life. During our exchange I felt a light fill the room. As I looked into their eyes and responded to their questions, I saw within each one a desire and search for purpose and meaning in their life. Their light was deep and bright and truly a privilege to be immersed in. Although I was there to share my story, it was *their* story that graced me with the light of understanding. They taught me through their presence and questions that whatever age we are, whatever our level of spiritual maturity is, whatever faith tradition we're rooted in we are all journeying into God's Light in our own way.

As we move into 2014 let us notice, be guided by, and journey into the Light in our heart. For a light even brighter and more beautiful than the aurora borealis lies within each of us.

So let your light shine and let it grow. God loves being Your Light.

***Scripture Readings—Epiphany***

Isaiah 60: 1-6  
Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6  
Matthew 2: 1-12