

Spirit, we breathe you like air, see because you are light, feel your energy in our own. In you, we begin. In you, we end. In your love we live each day. Thank you for today. Amen



SPiRIT

Jesus is Born

Narrator 1: In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All the people went to their hometowns to register. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to David's town of Bethlehem—because he was of the house and lineage of David—to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child.

Narrator 2: While they were there, she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger. There was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged.

Narrator 3: Shepherds lived in the nearby fields and took turns keeping watch over their flock at night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them, as the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were very much afraid.

Angel: You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you—tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Narrator 4: Suddenly, many angels began to praise God and sing with the angel.

Angels: Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom God's favor rests.

Narrator 1: The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger. They went out and told everyone about the child and about what the angels said.

Narrator 2: All who heard were amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary treasured these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned to their fields, praising God.

Shepherds: Thank you, God, for sending the Messiah to us. And for letting us poor shepherds be the ones to tell the good news to everyone.

Narrator 3: Thank you, God, for sending the Messiah to us. And for letting us poor shepherds be the ones to tell the good news to everyone. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child. He was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2.1-21



Three EPIPHANIES

by Rose Tillemans, CSJ

A strong-looking, stocky man with sad, intelligent eyes appeared in the Peace House door the morning of December 24. I'd never met him before. He wore plain, neat clothes like many of the homeless men who come to our street oasis every day. It was nearly meditation time, so I invited him to move into our circle. We went around with names as usual. When our visitor's turn came, he said in a soft, rich voice, "I am Issa, and I was born in Bethlehem." A quiet awe settled over the room. We had never been visited by anyone from Bethlehem before and on Christmas Eve Day!

That morning our theme was: How might Jesus appear if he came in the year 2000? Next to me sat an Ojibwe woman trying to quiet her baby grandson. The child was usually so bright and happy, but that day he wailed a lot—seemed fussy and unsettled. Jiggling the baby, the grandmother spoke. "I think Jesus would look like my father. He would have a strong voice for our people and restore our dignity."

Others had seen pictures only of a tall, fair-skinned thin man with pink cheeks and long, wavy hair. "In Sunday school the baby Jesus was lying in a cold stable with a little blanket over him and his arms reaching out. He had golden curls and a circle of light around his head. Not a peep out him. He just lay in that straw so perfect. Black folks like me just couldn't figure it out!"



Issa from Bethlehem listened with interest to the discussion. "I'm quite dark-skinned, but Jesus might have been even darker than I am," he added. "But his skin color, how he came to be, where he was born, are not the important things. It was his message, his example, what he said and did. He was all of us. We are all one." Issa swept out his arms to include all in the room. We pondered his words.

After meditation and lunch Issa offered to do the dishes with two suburban women guests. I heard them laughing and chatting with

each other in the kitchen. One woman slipped a ten-dollar bill to Issa when the work was done. He nodded to them graciously, put the bill in his pocket, slipped into his jacket, and quietly headed out into the snow.

Who was this man who came to us on Christmas Eve? Will he ever return?

After supper in my apartment that Christmas Eve, I decided to go to St. Stephen's Shelter to be with some of my Peace House friends who would be staying overnight there. I waited in front of my building for the bus. No stars in the sky. Even on Franklin Avenue, hardly a car in the street. The snow piled on the elm branches near me spoke "hush, hush." My bus inched slowly toward my stop. I boarded carefully, dropped in my coins and settled in behind the driver. When I looked around I saw only three other passengers.

"Miz Rose, Miz Rose, is that you?" An attractive young woman sitting toward the back got up and moved toward me. "I'm Sasha, remember? Peace

Sister Rose Tillemans founded Peace House in an old storefront just south of downtown Minneapolis.

Rose lived in the neighborhood and knew the people. She wanted Peace House to be a welcoming community in the heart of the inner city.

Sister Rose is gone now, but volunteers keep Peace House open.



Sister Rose with Buggy

They provide a safe and peaceful atmosphere built on acceptance, a sense of belonging, friendship,

dignity, and serving one another. At 11:30 each day, the doors to Peace House close so the people who have come have time for prayer and sharing. After this the doors open again, and the volunteers serve lunch to all comers.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Feast of Epiphany

All nations worship Jesus

NARRATOR: After Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of King Herod, magi from the east arrived one day in Jerusalem.

MAGI: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.

NARRATOR: At this news King Herod became greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem. He summoned all of the chief priests and scribes of the people.

HEROD: Where is the messiah to be born?

PRIESTS, SCRIBES: In Bethlehem of Judea. Here is what the prophet has written.

MICAH: And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is shepherd to my people Israel.

NARRATOR: Herod called the magi aside and found out from them the exact time of the star's appearance. Then he sent them to Bethlehem with these instructions.

HEROD: Go and get detailed information about the child. Report your findings to me, so that I may go and offer him homage, too.

NARRATOR: After their audience with the king, the magi set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house, found the child with Mary, his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They received a message in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went back to their own country by another route.

Matthew 2.1-12

House paid my rent about five years ago. I've been doing so good!"

I told her I was glad about that. "But you're drinking Sasha. I thought you had..."

She interrupted, "A person has to have a little fun on Christmas Eve, Miz Rose. Where are you going?"

I told her.

When it was time for me to get off, she jumped up and followed me down the steps. "I'll walk you to the shelter so you won't slip," she assured me. "It's dark out." She took my arm and with a reverent gentleness—a gracious tenderness, accompanied me to St. Stephen's.

At the door I asked Sasha, "Where are you headed tonight?"

She responded cheerfully, "Oh, I'm going to meet a friend at a motel."

I knew what she was about and felt sad. This was her way of supporting her family—the same as five years ago, I mused. Sasha disappeared into the darkness of this Christmas Eve. I recalled Jesus' words, "And the prostitutes

will go first into the kingdom of heaven," and stepped inside.

The men in the shelter were restless, edgy, moving from their bunks to the snack table—then outside for a last smoke before the door was locked. I visited with several. A boombox blared the Rudolph song. A young man handed me his new poem.

*Silent night, holy night.
Nothing calm. Nothing bright.
In this shelter there is no child.
Everybody is nearly wild.*

I read the poem and nodded. What does one say to a homeless man on Christmas Eve?

After an hour I headed to the door to catch my bus going east. Billy, a small dear man who comes to Peace House, was standing outside on the top step. He told me he hadn't pulled the right number that would get him a bed inside.

"Where are you going?" he asked me with a concerned expression.

I told him. Billy tossed his cigarette into the snow and stepped on it. He was a little high. We at Peace House knew he was a drug dealer, but ever so kind to everyone.

"I'm going to walk you to the bus. It's too dark and slippery for you to be out alone."

He grabbed my arm firmly, and we hurried down the walk, reaching the stop just as the bus pulled up. I stepped in and turned back to thank Billy.

"I hope you'll find a bed somewhere." I called to him.

"Don't you worry, Rose," he answered. "I'm like Jesus. I got nowhere to lay my head."

The bus door swung shut, and we jerked ahead. I sat down and removed my steamed-up glasses. Some frozen tears were stuck to the lenses.

QUESTIONS 1 Who appears as Christ to Sister Rose? 2 What is the importance of a place like Peace House for people on the streets? 3 What do Rose's frozen tears express? 4 How do the magi find Jesus? 5 What importance do you see in people from other nations worshipping Jesus?

God, our beginning and end

Sunday's gospel tells the Gentile Christmas story. The word *Gentile* refers to all people who are not Jews. It is the word in Hebrew for *the nations*. The magi are from the East, perhaps from Persia; they are not Jewish.

The magi are learned seekers who study the stars. They are questioners. In Matthew's gospel the magi represent all the people who search for God in the created world—in our own being and in life that is and surrounds us.

The magi observe a new star in the heavens, in the natural world. Their questions about the meaning of this new star lead them into a new land among a new people. When they find the child Jesus, they worship him and take home with them the good news that his coming is for all the people of the world.

Some theologians refer to creation as the first book of revelation. The Old and New Testaments report how God acted in Israel's history and has come among us in Jesus. Creation is not a book, but creation reveals God and leads us to question where we come from and where we are going.

The first book of the bible, Genesis, describes God speaking and earth, sky, sea, land, sun, moon, stars, and all creatures coming into being. The last book of the bible, called Revelation, describes the new heavens and new earth when Jesus will come again in glory. In Christian faith God is our beginning and our end.

Scientists today tell a new creation story about how all that is has unfolded from the first great flashing forth 13.7 billion years ago.

5 BILLION years ago the sun and solar system were born.

4 BILLION years ago life began on Earth.

2 BILLION years ago Earth's oxygen atmosphere developed.

1 BILLION years ago simple life forms began to reproduce.

700 MILLION years ago multicellular life forms emerged; then fish, insects, dinosaurs, birds, and mammals.

2.6 MILLION years ago the first humanoids developed.

40,000 YEARS ago homo sapiens sapiens evolved.

2,000 YEARS ago Jesus was born.

If we fit the whole history of the universe within one year, humanoids evolve on the last day and homo sapiens sapiens at 11:58.36, the last few seconds of the year. We humans are newcomers to unfolding, cosmic life.

As life evolves, life forms grow increasingly complex and diverse. Every life form wants to be all it can be and more. Animals and plants have memory encoded in their genes that attunes them to their environment and what is necessary to live and thrive. Homo sapiens sapiens not only have instincts

God's very being is love. God is an external exchange of love, Father, Son, and Spirit, and has destined us to share in that exchange.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #221

encoded in their genes but have become conscious. We know we know, which gives us our species name. Yet all that lives remains connected and interdependent. We live in a web of unfolding life 13.7 billion years old.

For Christians time is pregnant. We are in a birthing process. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome that all creation groans in the labor pains of bringing Spirit to birth (Romans 8.18-24).

Christians see in Jesus a turning point in history—toward a new promise of sharing life with God. We see in Jesus what God is like. Jesus reveals love as the divine energy that holds together all that is. Jesus reveals God as a web of love relationships, three in one love—Father, Son, and Spirit.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Read the lyrics of Christmas and Epiphany songs in your parish hymnal. What do these hymns say about who Jesus is and what his importance is in the history of the world?
- 2 Decide a way to work to make God's promise of peace come true in our world. Journal about who God is for you. Keep your writing where you can read it in five years, ten years.
- 3 Listen to music from Paul Winter's album *Missa Gaia/Earth Music*. What is your hope for our world this Christmas season?

