

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany by reading the story of the magi from the gospel of Matthew: *"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.'*" When leaders become fearful and their power is threatened, some will do anything to stop the potential threat. Herod was no exception and aimed to kill the Christ child at any cost with no regard for the innocent bystanders. This response continues today as narcissistic, power hungry, insecure leaders throughout the world corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.

But what stands out for me most in today's gospel, is the final sentence of the reading: "And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the [wise men] left for their own country by another road." Where did these men get this wisdom? How did they know that Herod had evil intentions from such a brief visit with him? Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments. Wisdom involves insight, discernment, listening to a variety of voices, paying attention to intuition and sound judgment in various situations. For Christians, wisdom comes from God.

Each year, I collect wisdom sayings that have crossed my path during the past 12 months. It is a spiritual discipline for me to reflect on these wisdom sayings articulated by others whom I believe are inspired by God and God's dream for a new humanity. These are the ones whose principles are based on compassion, truth, peace, generosity, and the dignity of every human being. What follows, is a treasure chest of wisdom gleaned from 2024:

**Hope** is the Conviction that the future holds new possibilities that are not evident in the present.

- "Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise." (Victor Hugo)
- "I want to be part of a people who see the darkness, know it's real, and then light a candle anyway." (Sarah Bessey)
- "Your mind will always believe everything you tell it. Feed it hope. Feed it truth. Feed it with love."
- "Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you."

**Joy** is an attitude of the heart which soothes even in the most sorrowful of situations.

- "Choosing to have joy is not naively thinking everything will be easy. It is courageously believing that there is still hope even when things get hard." MHN
- "Your soul is beaming with flowers. It's time to stop watering your scars." (Pavana)
- "If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. I will not allow my life's light to be determined by the darkness around me." (Sojourner Truth)
- "The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts." (Marcus Aurelius)
- "We're a nation hungry for more joy because we're starving from a lack of gratitude." (Brene Brown)
- "Sometimes people are unhappy because they keep listening to unhappy people."
- "We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or we can rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."
- "If you have the power to make someone happy, do it. The world needs more of that."
- "The walls we build around us to keep sadness out also keep out the joy." (Jim Rohn)
- "If you choose not to find joy in the snow, you will have less joy in your life but still the same amount of snow."
- "Be like a crow: collect shiny things, hop happily down the street for no apparent reason. Scream loudly when you see your friends."
- "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your saving help again." (Psalm 51:11,13)

**Peace** is harmony among all of God's creatures in all of creation.

- "The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world. Angry people cannot create a peaceful planet." (Marianne Williamson)
- "Forgive others, not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace."
- "Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the presence of justice." (William Faulkner)
- "It is only when a mosquito lands on your testicles that you realize there is a way to solve problems without using violence." (Confucius)
- "It's a broken society that loves its guns so much that it refuses to alter its relationship with them even for the sake of its children. It's a broken Christianity that not only sees nothing wrong with our society's unholy love of guns but supports it."

**Love:** Love is patient, kind, and rejoices in the truth. Love is the Greatest Gift of All

- "When you do a thing with love, you have succeeded, even if it didn't go the way you hoped it would. You loved. That matters." (Nanea Hoffman)
- "The world is changed by your example not by your opinion." (Paulo Coelho)
- "You may not always see the results of your kindness, but every bit of positive energy you contribute to the world makes it a better place for all of us."
- "Never think that what you have to offer is insignificant. There will always be someone out there who needs what you have to give."
- "It is hard to lead well in unwell times...And yet, we are called to stand against anything that stands against love." (Bishop John H. Taylor)
- "Some believe it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. It is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love." (JRR Tolkien)

**Truth:** Jesus said: 'If you continue in my word...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'

- "We must allow the word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our thought and patterns of behavior." (John Stott)
- "However much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing." (Orwell)
- "In times of universal deceit, telling the truth will be a revolutionary act." (George Orwell)
- "Things are not getting worse. They are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil."
- "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch and do nothing." (Albert Einstein)
- "Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth." (William Faulkner)
- "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing." (Malcolm X)
- "Do not accept anything as truth that lacks love and do not accept anything as love which lacks truth. One without the other is a destructive lie." (Edith Stein)
- "A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right, and evil doesn't become good, just because it is accepted by a majority." (Booker T. Washington)

**Other:**

- "Your diet is not only what you eat. It is what you watch, what you listen to, what you read, and the people you hang around. Pay attention to what you feed your soul, not just your stomach."
- "Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates: Is it True? Is it necessary? Is it kind?"
- "Never be a prisoner of your past. It was just a lesson, not a life sentence."
- "The world isn't fair. But you can be."
- "The price good [people] pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men." (Plato)

- "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." (John Maxwell)
- "Lessons from a Christmas tree: Be a light in the darkness. It's okay to fall over sometimes. Bring joy to those around you. Sparkle and twinkle whenever you can. And remember, it's perfectly fine to be a little tilted."
- "Only bad things happen quickly. Good things often take time and effort to build. Be patient with yourself and your progress and appreciate the slow and steady unfolding of life's positive aspects."
- "If you see your glass as half empty, pour it into a smaller glass and stop bitching."

*True Christianity is following in the footsteps of Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.*

- "We were raised to believe that 'taking the Lord's name in vain' meant using a swear word, but I've grown to realize 'taking the Lord's name in vain' is when Christians do racist, sexist, bigoted, hateful stuff and say they're doing the Lord's work."
- "The Holy Ghost doesn't only make you dance and speak in tongues. It also makes you apologize, shut up, and examine yourself."
- "Sometimes we have to choose. So often in life it comes down to that: we have to make a choice. The crossroads is where our spirituality is lived out, where it shapes the world in which we live. When you find yourself standing in the place of decision, make sure you are standing next to the Spirit."
- "It is not the task of the church to 'Make America Great Again.' The contemporary task of the church is to make Christianity countercultural again. And once we untether Jesus from the interests of empire, we begin to see just how countercultural and radical Jesus' ideas actually are. Enemies? Love them. Violence? Renounce it. Money? Share it. Foreigners? Welcome them. Sinners? Forgive them. These are the kind of radical ideas that will always be opposed by the principalities and powers, but which the followers of Jesus are called to embrace, announce, and enact."
- How do you know the difference between religion and Jesus? Religion shames people for having dirty feet. Jesus kneels to wash them."
- "Good thing that Jesus lives in our hearts cause if he lived in America, he'd be deported."

*Wisdom from The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

"It's madness to hate all roses because you got scratched with one thorn,  
to give up all dreams because one of them didn't come true,  
to give up all attempts because one of them failed.  
It's folly to condemn all your friends because one has betrayed you,  
to no longer believe in love just because someone was unfaithful or didn't love you back,  
to throw away all your chances to be happy because something went wrong.  
There will always be another opportunity, another friend, another love, a new strength.  
For every end, there is always a new beginning.....  
And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;  
what is essential is invisible to the eye."

*Prayer by Bishop Deon Johnson:* "Holy Wisdom, You blessed us with the capacity for memory, reason, and skill. Grant us in the day unfolding, the gift of remembering hope, the knowledge of seeking peace, and the blessing of being loved. For the sake of Christ. Amen"