

Epiphany 2026

Another Road

I want to start this morning by taking a short poll. First: How many of you still have your Christmas Tree up? Second: What do you have on the top of your Christmas tree, a star or an angel. How many of you have stars on top of your tree? How many of you have angels?

The reason I asked the first question is: Christmas, from the Christian perspective isn't truly over until January 6th or Epiphany, the day we traditionally celebrate the visit by the Wise Men. The reason I asked the second question is: I think there are two types of people. Some are star people and some are angel people.

Biblically, the Angel represents those who had been waiting for the Messiah, for a sign from God, for a long time, like the Shepherds. They knew what the Angel meant when he told them about a Savior, a Messiah. They remembered the old prophecies. They remembered with anticipation.

And the Star was for those who were still searching, those still unsure, those still with questions, those on a quest to find out about this mystery and message from God wrapped up in human flesh and swaddling clothes.

A friend reminded me that God sent both the Angel and the Star because God always meets us where we are.

Setting off Alarms

I know of a congregation that, for many years, provided a "living nativity pageant" in its community. The church is in the center of town and has an expansive front lawn. On a certain December Sunday afternoon each year, it would fill that lawn with live sheep and goats and donkeys, costumed shepherds and wise men, a gaggle of angels, an innkeeper, a manger, and, of course, the holy family. Ample crowds would gather each year to see the Christmas story acted out live and in person.

One year, the men who were playing the role of the Magi borrowed a thurible, an incense-burning censer, from the Catholic parish in town. The idea was that as they trekked across the lawn toward the manger, these mysterious Magi from the East would surround themselves with a fog of incense to add to the exotic quality of their appearing.

So the wise men gathered in the fellowship hall, waiting for their cue. Just before the moment arrived, they lit the incense and got it burning properly. Unbeknown to them, though, they managed to trigger the church's fire alarm, which sent an automatic signal to the local fire department.

As they walked toward the manger, each bearing a gift for the newborn Jesus, they were astonished to see yellow-slickered firemen unrolling fire hoses across the church lawn and mingling in a scene of confusion with the shepherds, angels, and goats. Ultimately, the fire chief spotted the burning incense pot, put two and two together, and announced in a loud voice heard by all, "You wise men are setting off alarms all over town!"

Somewhere in the Great Beyond, the original Magi smiled in approval, remembering that they, too, had set off alarms all over town. By Thomas G. Long

The gift of the Magi, and our gift to Him:

Once, the people of a very poor parish set their hearts on acquiring an expensive set of figures for their Christmas crib. They worked hard and managed to get a set of rare porcelain for their crib. The Church was left open on Christmas day so that the people could visit the crib. In the evening when the parish priest went to lock up, to his consternation he found the baby Jesus was missing. As he stood there, he spotted a little girl with a pram entering the church. She made straight for the crib, took the baby Jesus out of the pram and put him lovingly in the crib. As she was on her way out the priest stopped her and asked her what she was doing with the baby Jesus. She told him that, before Christmas, she had prayed to Baby Jesus for a pram. She had promised him that if she got the pram, He would have the first ride in it. She had got her pram so she was keeping her side of the bargain. — Christmas evokes generosity in all people, especially in children.

It was the poverty of the Infant Jesus that caused the Magi to open their treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and lay them before him. What is our gift to him? (Flor McCarthy in *New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies*, quoted by Fr. Botelho).