

My name, Estelle, means star. When I was in high school, I got the lead in a couple of plays. They called me a star. When I did some TV work in Los Angeles, they called me a star. The truth is that only when I was ordained to the ministry, did I become a star because the star led the way to Jesus. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, help light the path for you.

A few days ago, I lost my voice. In the post-Christmas, post-Creche Sunday time, it's as though my body said, 'ok, all of the critically important things are done, you can get sick now.' I've only had laryngitis a couple of times, but this time, there was one day when I couldn't speak and be understood-at all. Interestingly, though, I could whisper.

I've come to learn that whispering is very similar to speaking, but it doesn't involve the vibration of the vocal chords. In whispering, there's more 'breath' in the speech. I got to thinking about how wind is a sign of the Holy Spirit and how God breathed life into humankind in the very beginning. And that led me to where I'm leading you today: God whispers. God doesn't shout. God isn't flashy. God is steadfast and peaceful and ever present. Whispering. And only some hear God. Only some are listening.

There was an old perfume commercial that said, "If you want to capture someone's attention, whisper." (Remember? It was for Prince Matchabelli.) That's true. If someone is listening for the whisper, they will hear it. Over and over in scripture, we hear Jesus say, "let all who have ears, listen".

Friends, in a world that is loud and screaming with injustice and poverty and illness, God is whispering. "I am here-with you." The world is discordant and cluttered and fast-paced. Only those looking and listening for God's peaceful whisper will hear it.

The star that the Magi followed was a whisper, appearing in the sky for all to see, yet few understood it's significance. It wasn't a giant Las Vegas style neon sign with an arrow pointing to the place Jesus was, but it clearly pointed the way for those who knew to look for it.

Those who were looking for it were wise men from the East. They were probably not kings, but astrologers. Their station in life is far less important than the fact that they were 'from away'. They weren't Roman. They weren't Jewish. Any commentary will tell you that the magi represent the Gentiles (that is, those who were not Jewish) recognizing the kingship of Jesus. That's a whisper that could get lost in the noise of the world, but it's important for us to know as we try to make sense of what this passage means for our lives today.

Also, because we know all about Christ's life and death and Resurrection, we can understand another whisper in the symbolism of the gifts given: gold for his kingship, frankincense for his priestliness (ministry) and myrrh which was used to anoint a sacrifice.

There may or may not have been three kings. We say three because there were three gifts, but the truth is that may have been far more. These brave men left their families and all they knew to embark on a long and dangerous journey. Think about it, we know that King Herod is about to go enact an infanticide, actually killing all male children up to the age of two.

Why two? Because he called the Wise Men and asked when the star appeared. If the star appeared when Jesus did, he could be up to two years old.

Our 'wise men's' journey may have been up to two years through unknown territory, probably filled with bandits. They followed the light, not knowing where they'd get their provisions, probably not speaking the language, and possibly dependant on others for assistance along the way. For two years. (Can you even imagine? The two hours to get into Boston feels like forever some days!) This was the very first Christian pilgrimage.

A pilgrimage involves traveling somewhere, usually far away, probably at terrific expense, and it could involve some risk. The Magis' journey was to pay the homage to the young Jesus. As Christians, our job is to serve Christ who told us, "as you have done unto to the least of these, you have done it unto me." If you make a pilgrimage, your journey need not be to Jerusalem or Fatima Vatican City. Your pilgrimage may be to go Lewiston or Bangor or Portsmouth. You could look for Christ there so that **you can amplify God's whisper, "I am here with you."**

You can shine Christ's light. The star was a light shining in darkness. We all know that stars are where they are all of the time, but we don't see them in the daylight. Yet, in those dark times...those uncomfortable, painful, frustrating, unfair times, tragic times, we can see the light...and we can hear God's whisper "I am here-with you-always."

I volunteered at a food pantry in Massachusetts and got friendly with the manager. One day we were talking about difficult times in our lives and she said, "You know, Estelle, when I started here, I was working part-time. My husband had just died and I had three small children. At the end of each shift, the manager would give me fruits and vegetables to take home, saying, 'they'll just go bad'. It was months before I realized she was helping me out because she knew I needed it." The light of her boss' kindness became apparent in her time of darkness.

We may not be kings, or astrologers, or otherwise 'wise men', but we are those who recognize Jesus as God. We have opportunities to take what we know about Christ and his ministry, to listen for God's whispers, and to be like the magi everyday.

Ultimately, each of us is one of the Magi, on a quest to find Christ. We're entrusted with the sacred responsibility of protecting love incarnate and giving it a chance to grow and teach. Ultimately, each of us is one of the Magi, both on a personal pilgrimage and in a communal sense, showing the world that Christ is God-with-us and bringing the light of His love to others. Blessed be and amen.