

Sunday, January 8, 2012

Epiphany B  
Universe as the Primary Revelation

## Reflection from John Surette, SJ

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in the days of King Herod, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying: We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage” (Matthew 2:1-2).



The magi were professionals when it came to relating to the stars. They related to them not as objects to be studied in a way that we could call scientific but as subjects that have some truth to reveal. They were experienced when it came to allowing their own wisdom to engage with the wisdom of the stars. They searched for truth in the wonders of the Universe. They were not afraid to search the stars because their expectation was that the search would result in an enrichment regarding the meaning of their lives here on Earth.

The star that led them across the desert to Jerusalem spoke to them of the birth of a King. They were overjoyed at this revelation. After finding the King and paying him homage, they returned to the East from where they had come. The journey was worthwhile for them. They returned home enriched since the event they experienced in Bethlehem was not what they had expected. The King they encountered there was quite different from the king they had imagined.

The lesson of the magi was lost to many generations throughout Christian history. There was, for example, a dark time in Europe and in our own country as well. It was a time when women went into the forests and related to what they found there, related to what was there not as objects to be studied and measured but as subjects containing truths to be revealed. The women allowed the truth of the trees and the plants, the truth of the roots and the leaves, to speak to them. They were enriched by the wisdom that was revealed. It was wisdom for healing and for more abundant living.

Civil and church authorities in those times were fearful of the forest and what went on there. They imagined that evil spirits of all kinds lived in the trees and plants, the roots and leaves. They labeled the women who went there as witches and as collaborating with the devil. The authorities tortured them and even burned some of them at the stake.

We believers in this 21st century need to embrace the lesson of the magi because there is a strand in the fabric of our Christian tradition that is suspicious of the stars, trees, and plants.

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It is a strand that sees the natural world as a side trip off the main road to God or, even worse, as an obstacle on the road to God. This strand constitutes a darkness from which we need to be saved.

The truth is that the only knowledge we have of the Creator is through our experience of the Creation. God's Universe is the way to God. Each and every being in the Universe has its own inner truth and its own voice that speaks to us about that Ultimate Mystery from which it comes and within which it exists. The truth is that the whole Universe from the farthest galaxy to the smallest atomic particle, from the rivers and prairies to all of humankind, reveals something of the Divine and offers some enlightenment and enrichment regarding the meaning of our lives.

Consider for a moment how those photos of distant galaxies taken by the Hubble telescope evoke within many of us a sense of awe and wonder. Like the magi, we modern people are beginning to be attentive to the powers and mysteries of the Universe. We must not be afraid of doing this for in doing it we will be blessed. Our lives will be enriched, and, as a result, there will be an enhancement for the entire Earth community because it too will be blessed.

This blessing will be a gift for us, not a gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but a gift of the presence of the Divine in all things...an experience of God's Universe as being God's primary revelation.

For us Christians, Jesus is our special revelation. For all of Earth's peoples, including us, God's Universe is the primary revelation!