



## Sunday after Epiphany

“...the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.”

*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5)*

*“After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me”*

*(John the Baptizer - Friday gospel )*

*“The one who comes after me is more humble than me”*

*(Linda at lunch on Friday answering the question about when we felt humbled in our life)*

At Pascha we come to the tomb to receive the light. At Theophany, the uncreated Light comes to “receive light from the lamp” (See the Royal Hours on Theophany). From the light that is about to perish. What people who in darkness saw, was the uncreated

Light coming to receive light from the life that was perishing within them. No matter how low the sin has brought us. When we look around and see people being bent over and harmed by their sins or the sins of others we see Christ lowering Himself more to receive from us the light that is within us. However low a level a person can reach, Christ humbles Himself more to approach that heart. It is this encounter that the community has been witnessing with all the people who came through the doors. How many thousands in all these years we do not know. But for every one of us, Christ humbled Himself to receive from us what we thought we had already lost or wasted.

Theophany reveals the knowledge of God who approaches every human heart from a lower place. This revelation goes far beyond what we can or we cannot do together with ourselves.

We live at the mission with this knowledge and with the sorrow that this does not produce in our heart enough fruits so we can become the visible church that encompasses all. We said many times people come and go, at times because they cannot settle, at times because we make mistakes because of many human affairs. They come and go so our hearts can be broken. And you don't know if the revelation at Theophany heals or makes the sorrow deeper within the heart. It probably does both.

We witness the humility of Christ that touches the heart but, collectively, we cannot approach each other the same. It is the sign of our times. To live within the heart with the humility of Christ and with the sorrow of losing your brother and your sister. This year at Theophany the prayer and the knowledge of God reveals this encounter between the humility of Christ and the lowly human heart in a way that is washing away the sins of not being able to live fully together with each other within the kingdom. That's why when the unity in Christ does happen, His humility becomes the path of those hearts.

**“The desert places of the Jordan shall blossom abundantly and rejoice exceedingly.”** (from Is 35: 1-10)

What really humbles us is not the sin that we go through and its consequences on us. What brings about humility in a lonely heart is when we see the way Christ approaches us. When we see the way His love is touching our being, from a lower place than the one we reached through our sins or the sins of others.

The scripture at Theophany spoke to us about mountains of water. Waters that do not depart and become bitter and destructive if they are approached with a hardened heart.

We know all these mountains of water from our lives and from the lives of others.

We cannot approach them like the Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They went through all the plagues and lost to death those they loved the most and yet humility was not brought within their hearts.

The scripture tells us that it is not the sorrows that bring about humility within the heart, but it is the humility of Christ that approaches our heart in love, while sorrowful.

When we behold that and receive a contrite heart, the mountain of water becomes life giving, sweet and refreshing like dew. They depart so we can walk on dry land together with Christ, wherever He takes us. We dare approach Him and walk with Him, being baptized in His death, so we can have a better resurrection.

This Sunday Eliana will receive the baptism. She puts on Christ so the many mountains of water she has been climbing would depart and become sweet. So her life becomes His life so she can live everything with joy because she has much loved. Please keep Elaina in your prayers.

\*Please pray for the community In Goma and the children in their care:

Neema; Rosine; Justine; Miriam; Chance; Jemyma; Patricia; Alliance; Nice; Dorcas; Justine; Agnes; Muhindo Dorcas.

\*On Sunday we are going to collect money to help our sister community in Goma to start a bakery. They take care of abandoned girls in order to provide them with a home and to help them acquire skills that will help them have a decent life.

They focus on sewing and baking.

Please talk to Fr Nicolaie if you want to help more.

Please pray for the sick:

Tihomir; Kate; Payton Clark (back surgery; ); Kim; Sana, and her family in Egypt. Sana's father passed away in Egypt; Isaiah; Pani Alexandra; Mary Mcgee's daughter Sydney; Peter Christine; Stephanie; Iulia; Jason; Sophia; Alexander; Charles; Tom; Paul; Phillip Hadler and his wife Juliet; Cristeena; Ann brown's daughter; Constanta; Jeni; Florea, Robert; Constantin, Silvia, Claudia Alex; Jincy; Shiron Crisreen; Allain; Levalin and the family; Seena Colin and her husband;; Waheeda and children; Faizah (depression); Shirin and her family; Sana and her husband; Eva; Frank, Cristina; Daniela, Jerry; Delia; Ati ; Ragaie; Victoria; Prayers for Mike. Farida need prayers for her hand to heal ; Prayers for Roselyne and family ; Ana, Cornelia; Prayer for Leon to Jerry; Nikitha, Ocean; Prayer for Gloria, Anne, Marina, Marie, Edemene; Joanna and family GN; Rejoice; Romana, Colin, Michael, Peter, Henry, Joanna, George, Kelly; Tom; Marina; Sandra and her son Chris; Kumari; Susan; child James; Aaron; Sylvia; Fr Jonathan; Tharshini and her two children; Ann Tyron and her family; Sandra Gomaz's children; Sameen; Sophia; Amy; Swetha and children; Charitha; Jitesh's parents ; Demene; Carol; Gloria; Hawa Bibi; Vimaladevi; Tharsini and her child; Sana's Sister; Ann T.'s husband; Lynn; Michelle; Emanuel (Mani); Stefanie; Geoff; Joey; Evangelia; Sophia; Melanie; Césare; Tanya; Piper; Darius; Zamalk; Nelly; Nahla; Mira; Sandral ; Brenda; Anna Avairo's daughter Vol Gomaz; Levlin's two children Sri' ; Helen; Paul; Wafaa and Sana's sister.

Please pray for health and salvation: Rejoice; Claudio of San Egedio health and salvation; George, Connie, Nick, Fennie, Theodore, Chris, Nick , Toulia, Steven , Nicole, Tony, Sam, Sophia.; Prayer for Mary Mcgee. She lost her grandmother.; Fr. Michael and Pani Karen; Anthony and the family. He lost his bro in Trinidad. He is hoping to make a visit to Trinidad; Ramanand and his families in Guyana, USA and here in Canada. Ramanand lost three of his family members including one of his brothers, suddenly within two months. Paola. Elizabeth; Matthi; Dave

and his family; Jai's family; Anne Tyran; Joseph to find housing; Lito; Mauro, Prayers for Ted's family (incarcerated son to be free)

Dameal asking prayers for his future wife Fathima to be free from addictions Liz Gibicar asking prayers for her mother; Mom waiting for baby

Tejasree;Prashastha

Maria and Dingo; Crisent; Helen; Greta; Elizabeth; Dean; John; Liz; Crisent; Ann Brown; Elizabeth; Sifie; Allen; Leon;Ricky and his family from back home for the hope of reuniting; Aaron, Anastas, Olivia, Gelly, Frank, Eva, George, Rebecca, Andreas, Cathyann, Reigan, Stephanie, Peter, Christine; Christian family from Bangladesh, Sandra, Peter, Angel, Bless, Grace, Swetha family; Atlaw single mom at shelter, Vernevil family; the family of Kenide; Saathiya; Sena; Vinothiny

Yvienne; Abdul; Sakanthalathevy; Jumke; Naimi; Anish; Joshua DanielJMaria

Lolita Soliman Torres, Jonathan , Richard, Richard, Mary , Elizabeth, Michael, Bill,

Robert, Alan, Joanne

Please pray for the deceased: Rejoice mother

Pani Eleanor; Fr John; Alexandru, Constantin; Robert; fr Aurel; Georgi; Rada;Petre; Stela; William; Samuel; Debie; John; Amy, Willie; Dave's wife; Ana; Shirin 's cousin in Jordan; Father Lawrence; Dave; Anne Tyran's father; Edith, Sr. Mary Magdalene, Joice, BettyAnn, James, Pauanasuy Kamthasang, Maria (Covid), Andrei, Agostina ,Carminda, Vimaladevi's sister; Sri's mother, Carol's Mother and 23 year old nephew passed away in Haiti. Demene's mother; Dalalzaki

Christmas day 2021 (by Br Luke)

**"if the star hadn't been there they would not have known to come, even though they were very smart."**

...John Taylor, at Christmas Breakfast

It's Christmas day at the mission. When I cruise in around 7 am. George our Economos is already working since 5 AM and chattering back and forth with a fluttery female voice. This turns out to belong to Laura. Laura has arranged all the tables and chairs. "is this okay?" she trills into the kitchen to George. She seems to enjoy sitting on the chair having a moment to sit and enjoy before the people arrive.

When I throw the straw on the floor in great tufts she laughs and her eyes grow big. She lifts up her feet slightly from the floor as if to say that this is not something she wishes to be part of but she enjoys watching it.

Nathan and Harry arrive next and they begin talking animatedly about a setback one of them has experienced. Nathan hauls giant treat bags of hygiene products etc. up the treacherous stairway from the basement showing his great strength. He says that this is his worst day of the year but he is certainly making an impact on the day of others. Then comes a relatively new volunteer, Megan. She's studying to be an addiction counselor. I ask her to report to Laura for what to do and she does so. They begin working together for a bit. Later she's asked to sit with people and keep them company. For the rest of the morning she does this. Her voice sounds like Carrie's when she talks. high pitched and funny. We find out that she is vegan and discretely give her some olive and fruit amidst all the riotous Christmas fare. Chris N. arrives and asks for a job. He is ready for anything and everything. I tell him he should sit with people as there are already many volunteers. He does this for a few minutes but then gets himself right into the thick of the kitchen helping George and organizing things. This man cannot be tied! Laryssa is there too, all in white, looking like a million bucks. She is serving the meals from the hot trays in the kitchen. She is always presiding at the Wednesday dinners so this is her first spin at breakfast. She was also at the late liturgy the night before but she seems perfectly composed. George is concerned that because we don't usually offer breakfast on Saturday that not many people will come. It is also the end of the month, the beginning of a new covid spike, Christmas day, and raining. For the first few moments it seems like this might be the case...

The crowd that comes is not our usual breakfast crowd nor is our usual Saturday crowd but as Colleen says at the end, "it felt like everyone was there for a reason." There was no Edward. We'd later learn that his family had united to prevent him from coming to the mission. Many other regulars were missing (Sam, Marichi, Alison). The crowd instead seems like a sprinkling of regulars and curious people out walking the streets and happy to see an open door and drawn into it.



Some Middle-aged Chinese women are the first to arrive. They are disoriented and do not speak English. I had never seen them before. Laura keeps asking them politely to sit down but they cannot be suppressed! Next was Daniel from the breakfast program dressed all in black. He asked if his new dress shoes had arrived and drank 5 glasses of egg nog. Guests are showered with bags of toiletries, delicacies from Cobbs Bakery donated by Africans from Scarborough the night before, heavy plates laden with pancakes, eggs, sausages, sweetbreads, fruit. Not to mention Arrom's famous cake filled with custard!

People keep saying that the city was all-quiet with nothing-doing and indeed the street seemed that way. The quiet of the coming week of closure and coming quarantines is hanging in the air but for now there is music and sharing. It seems like time has been suspended. The night before had been very cold but as the instrumental Christmas music boomed from the radio the rain fell outside in a drizzle.



Lisa arrives with candles covered in gold sprinkle decorated like corn cobs, "light for the church" she says, and insists that we light them. She also brings 2 large pairs of women's pants

gift-wrapped for donation and a gift for Colleen. There's someone I have not seen for many months who appears in the middle of the room. Hector comes in-and-out about 6 times. He has found some colourful cubes with balls in them, "for under the Christmas tree!" he says. When we bring out the star on the pole and prance around with it his eyes follow it closely. He is paying close attention.

Others are paying attention too! The so called "3 brothers" come from afar bringing gifts! They manage to move through the crowd at the front and get to sit in the main room. John talks about the king from the story of Jesus, "that pharaoh did not like them worshipping Jesus." Amidst the greetings and solicitude, there are reminders that this is not a hallmark movie. A sad man sits down on the red steps and eats his Xmas dinner in the rain. He says he is thinking about suicide. "I have lost my spirit," he says. "I've realized I'm hopeless. Coming to the mission is what I look forward to each the day. Do you see how sad this is? After this I will go home and cry."

Jay comes up the street with wild hair looking like swamp-thing. "I fell asleep outside the Chinese BBQ place!" And here comes Joanna..."CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM" She is picking up Murray to go to family Xmas dinner but it does not look like he's making it. Out front there is a crowd of people milling about, chatting or eating their food or waiting to take to go. A guy is waiting for his girlfriend to come from down the street and reports of her periodically reach the gathering. Joanna runs up to me and says, "this guy's girlfriend says that there are mice running on her gloves! I wonder what kind of drugs she's on!" Then there's Guy a frail old man from Acadia . He hops out of the cab with a friend from the shelter. a native guy named Len who is missing one leg.

Len sits for a couple of hours and seems very relaxed. He falls over onto the floor a few times. Guy busies himself serving people, distributing chocolates and joking around.

Joanna is dressed up and cheeks rouged. She naturally becomes drawn into all the fun. She walks up directly in front of each guest in the hall and abruptly introduces herself, "Hi, how are you!" . It

is so beautiful to watch how each guest is attended to. Laura comes by and asks "if you need anything or want a drink..." then George, or Larissa, "how about some of x, y, or z" then Megan or Harry sidling up for a longer chat. Then Joanna's "hi, how are you!" I think the new guy Guy brought in the cab, Len, was a stranger and witness to this. He kept offering everyone he interacted with a cigarette but no one took one. I think this was his spontaneous response to the gratitude around him. The mission will be closed next couple of days and more closures and COVID restrictions are in the forecasted by the city... people look distantly to the future while enjoying the cheer of the present time. Cool air wafts through the church as hot food and energetic volunteers move back and forth.

Suddenly there's Chris the psychoanalyst looking very dapper coming up the steps with a box of individually wrapped Ferrero Rocher chocolates. He says he thinks "it is important for him to be here on this day." He goes right into the main room and sits beside Colleen giving her his full attention. Colleen has made a real effort to be with us this morning. It is not easy for her to wake up early and she is always at the mercy of her tremors. Today she pushed through the rain and she arrives dripping and out of breath. She is wearing makeup and has dyed her hair for the occasion. For the second year in a row she sits in the same spot, right in the center before the chapel doors, behind a TV table sinking with the weight of food that she is not particularly interested in (at least not at the moment). She draws people to her to chat as long as she can hold their interest. She watches everything going on in the room. She is interested in everyone. She knows who's missing and why. She tells me about the stigma people experience when their teeth are bad and how her illness has led to her experiencing this.

At the door, Nathan is keeping a large crowd at bay. He combines a forceful desire to help them and listen to them with his strong, military door-presence. He makes everyone feel at ease and makes sure the door runs smoothly. Many refuse to eat Christmas food outside and instead wait patiently for seats. An Ethiopian friend arrives and has his first ever pancake while describing the horrors of the civil war in his country and how it is effecting churches here.

Near the end of the breakfast, Father Nicolaie and Presbyter Michaela arrive with little Nicodim. Nicodim refuses cake. We are told that he has been eating chocolate all morning. They go right to the chapel and father and son kneel before the icon of the nativity and share a silent moment. As the time draws to a close volunteers come out of the kitchen and eat with the remaining guests in a jovial half circle. Harry is sitting beside Colleen with a big grin on his face. Jill and Megan are talking it up. Even Chris sets aside his Herculean load to share a warm meal.

Colleen is the very last guest to go. When the lights are turned out she stands in the darkened room and looks into the chapel where the nativity icon is illuminated. She stands there gazing for a long time. Then down the ramp she moves slowly and deliberately lifting one long leg after another like a heron moving through a



marsh. Her mind is moving in the same manner, slowly, deliberately, she turns over what she has seen and heard today. She describes the day as "very meaningful."

At 11 am, Nathan is still outside talking to people on the steps. George has made the meal, cleaned the kitchen and squeezed in a shift at the bakery. Harry, Guy and I duck into the chapel for a silent sitting around the icon of the nativity. We don't go into it, but it feels like we are sharing prayers of gratitude.

The day continues to unfold into the evening. I spy a woman whom Colleen had noted as a conspicuous absence at breakfast. She is sitting on her front steps on a plastic sheet in the drizzly gloom of the evening looking glassy-eyed. She admits she had planned to come but had felt too depressed. "I didn't want to spoil everyone's good cheer," she says. She accompanies me on my way to the church without a specific purpose.

When we arrive we meet a man on the steps of the mission who looks like a shepherd. He is heavily and irregularly dressed with long matted hair and a thick beard. He is sitting where I had last seen him during the breakfast program still going through his things. Now, in the dark, the large white star above the mission door has become visible. "Wow" the lady says as we walk up the steps. Inside the warm church she sits in the back of the dark narthex looking into the chapel at the candlelit nativity icon. I came with a small list of things I had planned to do but her quiet presence recalled me to her better purpose. She had told me that day that she had skipped a class that she needed to get out of unemployment because it was on Christmas day. "It's the one day of the year when I don't do anything." she said.

In the dark quiet of the stable there was at least a dignity and presence to meet her and dignify her decision. I gave her some leftovers from the breakfast. There were not many unbelievably! She thanked me, but it was she who had brought me back again to the stable. On my way out, the shepherd was still hunched over his pack. We are living in different worlds but on the steps tonight, perhaps still warm with the glow of the breakfast's



spirit, we are able to sit closely and linger a bit longer on the steps of the church. We share a tea until another star-loving wanderer arrives to take me back to Lourmel (our community home) . And what a home he leads me into! Warm, safe, and quiet. We are aware that it holds buried within it a family (just arrived from Honduras ) that has made a long and dangerous journey to be with us and to give us new hope.