

Somewhere in the story we come to hear, there is a place for all of us to rest and to wonder—to act out our part in the Christmas pageant that has been assigned to us this year. In each character that comes to gather around the manger to play his or her role, there is a sense of awe expressed in different ways, and shaped by the events that bring us to hear this story, to light these candles, and to sing the familiar carols once again tonight.

Perhaps we arrive at Christmas Eve poor in spirit this year, wandering in and wondering if there is still a place for us where we are welcome and a little less alone. We are the shepherds who gather, tending to that to which we are entrusted to give our full care. Our charges may be children or parents, something dear to us, or even just a broken sense of our own self after a long and difficult chapter in the story of our soul. We may have even lost one of them along the pathways that lead to Bethlehem this year, and in so doing, lost a part of ourselves as well.

We wander out through fields, rocks, hills and plains, led by our own angels, hoping we are guiding our cares to some fulfillment. We meet each other on the way to ponder the meaning of this star or that; passing on what we believe to be true, and singing our metaphors to ward off the darkness in the comforting cadences of the poetry of faith.

Or, it might be that we stride through these doors tonight as magi—decked to behold, moving through our lives as people who are working at our full potential. We are aware that we have had a year that shows us to be clever, capable beings. We move ever closer keeping an eye towards our own star. Along the way, we meet those with more power than our own. We become aware that this world can be a dangerous and unpredictable place. Herods entreat us with sweet words of promise and reward, or threaten us when we act upon our own convictions, and at times even plot against us. The chief priests have signed party allegiance to Rome and dispense simple platitudes designed to keep us fearful and unquestioning. The temptation reaches out for us to buy shares and invest in the conglomerate of the status quo, where power functions like an out-of-touch CEO with issues of entitlement, running a bankrupt corporation in need of a spiritual bail-out.

What is at stake is lying in the manger, to whom we now bring the gifts of our attention, reverence and desire. Love cannot be bought and traded publicly, it does not belong to the priests or to Rome. It is simple, raw and vulnerable, and in constant need of nurture if Love is to fully thrive.

We are smart people, we magi, and tonight we know not to return back to the Herods and the priests. Wise people, let's go home by another way.

This year, some may be living the part of a character that is overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness, like the small, defenseless teenager named Mary. Perhaps there has been a surprise—an annunciation that suddenly everything would change for you in ways that still don't make sense. At her own annunciation, Mary discovered that she was filled with power.

Whose power is it? In the end, it is neither Mary's nor our own. But the power we have been given deep within can give birth to a full potential we could never conceive of alone. We can still be surprised by joy, filled with hope, bring peace to our souls and acknowledge that the source of our power is in the love that gives us birth, death, friends and family, nations and nature, and our own time in which we enter, play our scene as best as we can, and take our bow.

Perhaps you feel that yours has been a very small role, waiting in the wings with no lines to deliver, with no fantastic costume change or entrance music, like Joseph. Every single person gathered at the manger steps into the starlight, and when there is something precious to protect that you hold dear, whether an act of selflessness for someone close to you, or the part that you can play in the turning upside-down of the status quo, then off we will all go, like Joseph, leading the charges we hold dear to safety in our own flight to Egypt.

Whatever role we are in tonight, we've followed the star that brings us here to listen to this story again, to sing, to light candles against the darkness, and to be in each other's company. We bring our gifts and receive the love that is promised us. The star—we are hitched to, guided by, drawn to—shines again this Christmas beyond the rain and storms, to instill in us again a sense of the wonder that must be reborn in us each year. A child named Jesus was born in the humblest of places and taught us that love is above all, our highest aim. Such a simple proclamation changed our world, and we are here once more to find our role in accepting that love and then doing everything in our power to give it away.

Merry Christmas.