

**My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Barbers are notorious for spouting their unsolicited wisdom. A customer went in one day to get a haircut. He mentioned to the barber that he would shortly be leaving town to tour Europe. The barber said, “You shouldn’t do that. The weather in Rome is lousy. They had that terrible terrorist attack in Paris. And everybody is on strike over something or other in London. You think you’re going to see the Pope. You won’t even get close to him.”**

**A month or so later, the man returned, sat down in the chair, and the barber said, “You didn’t listen to me, did you? Wasn’t it just like I said. The weather was terrible in Rome. There are cops all over Paris. Nothing runs in London. And you didn’t get near the Pope.”**

**“Actually,” the customer said, “the weather in Rome was gorgeous, almost Spring-like; Paris was enchanting, with no sign of trouble; England was like a tonic for my weary soul; and not only did I see the Pope, but I knelt before him, and he bent down and kissed my forehead, then he asked me a very profound question.”**

**“What did he ask?” queried the barber. “The Holy Father asked me where did I get such a lousy haircut.”**

**Well, that shut the barber up. And I suspect there are more than a few here today who wish we would just move on from all this Christmas talk. Enough already! We’ve had enough!**

**Please bear with me today as we take in this last look at the Christmas story—the visit of the wise men. Let’s see if there might be a little wisdom for us to gain from it.**

**We really don’t know who they were. They’ve traditionally been referred to as Kings, Magi, astrologers, even magicians. So, let’s just call them Wise Men and see where there might be wisdom to be had.**

**The first clue to their wisdom is the question they ask, “Where is the newborn King of the Jews?” Apparently they were not Jews themselves. Yet, they sought a king; someone they could believe in; someone they could trust and follow. Bearing expensive gifts, we have to believe they were people of considerable wealth. Could it be? Could it be they had plenty to live on, but they were looking for something or someone to live for? And so that leads us to the first truth of the story. Just about everyone here today has enough to live on, but what or who are we living for? That’s the wisdom of the wise men. They understood that. They undertook a long, dangerous, difficult journey to find this child, the One who would give real meaning to their lives. Their wisdom might lead us to ask ourselves, “Who am I living for? What gives meaning to my life?”**

**The wise men came because they dared to follow a star rise in the sky. Stars were very important back then. People sought to chart their lives by the stars; they believed you could determine your future by the stars; they even believed that a person's destiny was forged by the star under which he or she was born. In any event, to their eternal credit, they chose to follow that star. Certainly thousands of others didn't see the star, and even thousands more saw it but didn't follow it. What is the wisdom here?**

**Most of us get trapped by routine. We let life wear us down to the point that we are dull to the breaking in of mystery and wonder. We get so busy that we never see a star. We'll never see stars when our eyes are focused on our plodding feet and our heads are bowed and our shoulders are sagging from anxieties, fears, and overwork.**

**The wisdom of the wise men admonishes us to stay alive to mystery, keep your eyes open to a star that might burst forth in the dark night of your soul. And those stars do burst forth. Sometimes it's the star that's seen in the wisdom of a little child; sometimes it's the unexpected action of a caring friend or even the random act of kindness of a perfect stranger; sometimes it's the message you hear in church or the voice of the Spirit that mysteriously invades your routine and you gain a perspective that you never had before. And there are those times that the star bursts forth in even your most agonizing moments—the death of a loved one, the devastating diagnosis of a terrible illness, chronic pain, or some other terrible loss. All of a sudden, meaning begins to unfold and life takes on a preciousness that it never had before. The star shines forth; you raise your head; open wide your eyes; your heart becomes tender, and you recognize a new reality. Follow it! Follow it!**

**There is yet more wisdom to be gained from the Wise Men. “They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” This is the ultimate wisdom of the Wise Men.**

**When they saw the child, they fell down before him in homage. When we come to Jesus, we can never come in equality; we must come to him in submission and surrender. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Master of all that is, that was, and that will ever be. It is only with the deepest humility that we can approach Jesus.**

**Then the Wise Men present their gifts: gold that speaks of His Kingship; frankincense, the sweet perfume used in temple worship and temple sacrifices—the gift for a priest. The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which literally means a bridge builder. The priest is the bridge builder between God and humanity, and that was to be Jesus' ultimate work. The third gift was myrrh—the gift for one who was to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. Jesus came into the world to die. Even at Christmas time we are reminded of that shattering truth—that Jesus is the only person who ever chose to be born.**

**But we also remember that he chose to die. He gave himself to us in life and he gave himself to us in death, and it is his death that is our redemption. It is this wisdom of the Wise Men that gives Christmas its year-long meaning. May your merry Christmas lead you into a truly happy and holy New Year.**