

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Happy Epiphany! As we have spent the last 12 days celebrating Christmas, and now continue to celebrate the Incarnation of our Lord on this feast today, I have been helped, personally, in my celebration by a song that has been running through my head for several days. It is not the most well-known of Christmas songs, but I think it is one of the loveliest. It's called "Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day," and in it, Jesus sings a song describing His Incarnation as a dance. And I ask you to please humor me as I sing two of its verses!

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day
I would my True Love did so chance
To see the legend of my play
To call my True Love to my dance

Sing Oh my Love, Oh my Love
My Love, my Love
This have I done for my True Love

In a manger laid, and wrapped I was
So very poor, this was my chance
Betwixt and ox and a silly poor ass
To call my True Love to my dance

Sing Oh my Love, Oh my Love
My Love, my Love
This have I done for my True Love

What is so astonishing to me about this song is the phrase in the mouth of Jesus to describe the person He is calling to Him – He says, "This have I done for My True Love."

That phrase is such a *romantic* phrase. It makes me think of old love songs, and Disney movies! But not in a bad way. It's a phrase of deep joy. Of delight and fulfillment. It says, "I have found him or her, the one whom I love."

It's also a phrase of life transformation. This is *the person* – my true love – whom my heart and soul have been waiting for all my life. This is *the person* I was meant to be with. This is the person my soul is longing for.

And so what fills me with wonder when I hear this song is that in it we have Jesus using the phrase "my true love", to describe *you*. You, in particular. You are the one His soul longs for, and yours longs for Him.

The phrase “my true love” is not really directed in general at “all humanity” or “my chosen ones.” But you, as an individual, are the one that Jesus is seeking and longing for. You are the cause of His deep joy, and you are the one He is ready to change and lose His life for. He is deeply, utterly, in love with you.

And everything – His whole life, His humble birth in a stable, His travelling and teaching and healing, and His conflict with the Pharisees and other leaders, His abuse at the hands of crowds and Roman soldiers, His struggling up a lonely hill in Jerusalem, and His offering of His life on a cross - all of this was for you. These events are the story of His life, told to help you know who He is, and how deeply He loves you.

I once heard a bishop preach on this idea, and he said it in a way that seemed shocking, and yet which, in my heart, I recognized as truth. He spoke of the Incarnation and in particular, the Crucifixion, and he said, “If you were the only human being who ever lived, God would have done this for you.”

So deep is His love for each one of us.

As the song goes, Jesus says “This” – the Incarnation – “This was my chance - to call my True Love to my dance.” With the story of His life and love Jesus calls us to Him. Calls us to respond with the same love for Jesus, our souls’ True Love. The one who loves us most deeply, and whom we can love above all else.

He yearns for us, and our souls yearn for Him, whether we know it or not. “Come join me,” He says, “I have done this all to invite you into my love.”

I think our response to this invitation can feel just like the first stirrings of a new love as we might experience it with another human. A stirring, an energy, a passion in our heart. A constant state of astonishment and joy that we have found this incredible person, *and* that *they* are rejoicing just as much in us! We feel a radiance that seems to brighten the whole world around us – so that everything is beautiful, so that we hardly want to sleep and miss any of it.

And we find that response to God in the Prophet Isaiah’s words in the Old Testament reading today – that God’s love and blessing, God’s radiance, causes us to be radiant – to shine with the same love, the same light, that is planted and takes root in us and then just glows for all the world to see.

For *all* the world to see. Today is the feast of the Epiphany, known also as the “Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.” Our Gospel reading this evening tells the story of the Wise Men from the East, which is the story of the first Gentiles – the first people outside the people of Israel – to hear of Jesus, of God come to us.

These wise men are often seen as signs that God’s love shown forth in Jesus Christ was directed, not just towards a chosen few, as it had originally seemed, but to each and every person, in every corner of the world. The Magi came from far off, informed by signs in heaven which they saw far in the East, where God first called out to them.

We know little of the journey of the wise men, though it was probably long, hard, confusing, and yet to them it must have been deeply important, to inspire them to go on this journey with no clear knowledge of what exactly

they would find at the end. We know little about their response – what they thought or understood when they arrived, or what they did after returning to their own country.

But St. Matthew does tell us this about their internal life when they found the place where Jesus was – he says, “They were overwhelmed with joy.”

Overwhelmed, flooded, overflowing with joy, a joy that must have spilled out of them and touched the people around them. The radiant joy and love of Christ took root in them in that moment, I believe, as they began, little by little, to realize and know in their hearts who and what this Child was. Their souls’ true love.

They worshipped Him. Gave gifts that are gifts for a king and God – gold, and incense, and myrrh as well, for one who would die.

They worshipped Him as God, and yet not as a distant, magnificent but unfathomable God far off on His throne in heaven. They worshipped Him as a tiny baby, physical and vulnerable and so very near. And still so unfathomable. A God you could see and touch. A God who knowingly entered a world of cold and darkness, pain and danger, to be near us, because He loves us.

To be near each person who stood around that manger, falling in love with God. And I hope and believe they, too, began to grasp the astonishing Truth that He had come for each of them. That this little baby could look on them with eyes full of love and that this love was for them and for all those whom they had left behind in the distant east – their friends, wives, children, allies, enemies.

That is another amazing thing about Jesus’ particular love for each of us. That just as it transforms each of us and makes us radiant, turning toward God like flowers turn toward sunlight, Jesus loves the person next to us with that same delight, that perfect, particular love that says they, too, are infinitely precious to Him.

And so can we, who are loved and united to Christ, catch a glimpse of *that* love, too? Can we recognize in our families, at our school and work, and in the people we pass in the streets, can we recognize other humans for whom Christ was born and died? Other people that Jesus gazes on and calls “My True Love,” too? Can we glow as brightly with joy that Jesus loves them, as well?

And can we help them feel that love, if they don’t know it themselves? Since we are beloved of God and we are the Body of Christ, can we love with Christ’s love, which has been poured into us, so that every person might see and know that they are precious, longed for, and beloved?

I pray that in our own lives of light and darkness, our times of joy and love and faith and even sorrow and doubt, we might find the strength to let God’s love shine through us, so that no one ever need doubt that they are Beloved. Amen.