

Camels on the Roof  
Matthew 2:1-12  
January 1 & 2, 2010

With Epiphany comes the question, "Where do we look for God?" The truth is that sometimes we find God in the most shocking and unexpected places.

I want to share with you a story from one of the saints of Islam. His name was King Ebrahim. King Ebrahim was wealthy according to every earthly measure. At the same time, however, he sincerely and restlessly strove to be wealthy spiritually as well.

"One night the king was roused from sleep by someone stomping on the roof above his bed. Alarmed, he shouted: 'Who's there?' 'A friend,' came the reply from the roof. 'I've lost my camel.'

Perturbed by such stupidity, Ebrahim screamed: 'You fool! Are you looking for a camel on the roof?'

'You fool!' the voice from the roof answered. 'Are you looking for God in silk clothing, and lying on a golden bed?'

The story goes on, according to Jesuit theologian Walter G. Burghardt, to tell how these simple words filled the king with such terror that he arose from his sleep to become a most remarkable saint.

The camel on the roof raises the Epiphany question, Where are you looking for God? This compelling question of life properly stands at the beginning of a new year. Our text from Matthew also raises the camel-on-the-roof question. The story of the Magi coming to visit the Messiah is a camel-on-the-roof reminder that God is not to be found where the world's princes and powers reside. The story calls us to be like the king's friend, willing to make a fool of ourselves asking the camel-on-the-roof question to a world busy seeking God in all the wrong places, willing to rouse the world with the message of "Arise, shine, for your light has come."

As we turn over a new year, one thing is sure: more and more people are trying to find a way to God by climbing the ladders of success and power and respectability. In these materialistic days, the pursuit of money and power has become one of the most powerful mystery religions ever to show its face in the history of humanity.

This makes it all the more imperative that the good news of Epiphany is that God is found in in the most unlikely place – in the humility of birth in a stable. As startling as a camel on a roof is, the Christian message is that the vulnerability of a life of homelessness, and the suffering of

death on a cross, are heralded as marks of God's most powerful work in the human life. The gospel writers, each in their own way, remind us that:

the light has come upon the "little ones" to share with the "learned,"

a light more brilliant than the pillar of fire by night has come to drive back the darkness.

You and I, as Christians, are called to offer a ministry of light and a message of illumination to those in power and to those who are broken.

In the words of Carl F. H. Henry, "The divine mandate is to beam light, sprinkle salt, and knead leaven into an otherwise hopeless world."

The magi point us to where the world's best hope; the world's only salvation comes from a place that nobody could have imagined.

God in the form of a little baby – who would have thought it.

It makes a much sense as looking for a camel on the roof.