

Love is the soul of the universe, and this soul knows no bounds—it embraces all people, all countries, all religions. The goal of Sufism, the great mystical tradition that grows out of Islam and idealizes Jesus as the prophet of Love, is to know love in all of its glorious forms; and every prophet, every practice, and every form of worship that leads towards love is, in essence, Sufism. The great Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi writes: “My heart holds within it every form, it contains a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for Christian monks. There is a temple for idol-worshippers, a holy shrine for pilgrims; There is a table of the Torah, and the Book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love and go whichever way Their camel leads me. This is the true faith; This is the true religion.”

Opening hymn is Green 100 “Seek Ye First”. We will sing the first verse followed by the alleluia section and then sing them together for verses two and three.

Our first reading comes from the Sufi poet and saint, Jalaluddin Rumi: “A story is like water that you heat for your bath. It takes messages between the fire and your skin. It lets them meet, and it cleans you! Very few can sit down in the middle of the fire itself like a salamander or Abraham. We need intermediaries. A feeling of fullness comes, but usually it takes some bread to bring it. Beauty surrounds us, but usually we need to be walking in a garden to know it. The body itself is a screen to shield and partially reveal the light that’s blazing inside your presence. Water, stories, the body, all the things we do, are mediums that hide and show what’s hidden. Study them, and enjoy this being washed with a secret we sometimes know, and then not.”

Our second reading comes from the book of Luke and reflects our opening hymn. “Then Jesus turned to his disciples: ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn, yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to their life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will God clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and God knows you need them. But seek God’s realm, and all these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Maker has been pleased to give you the realm. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’”

Our final reading is also from the poetry of Rumi, “Abandon this world that you may become Ruler of all worlds. Throw away your handful of sugar that you may become a sugar field. Leap like a flame through the sky. Scatter the dark spirits and become the pillar of heaven. When Noah sails upon the flooding waters you will be his ark. When the Prophet ascends to heaven, you will be his ladder. When Jesus walks among the weary souls you will be his healing breath. When Moses goes forth as a shepherd you will be his staff. A divine fire blazes within you. Don’t jump back like

a coward. Cook in that fire! Bake like bread! Soon you'll be the prize of every table, the life-giving food of every soul. Walk patiently through this troubled world and you'll find great treasure. Even though your house is small, look within it—you will find the secrets of the unseen world. I asked, "Why have I received only this?" A voice replied, "'Only this'—will lead you to That!"

Let us share our Concerns and Joys carried in our hearts this morning. Let us hold these expressions from Friends together with those unsaid in our hearts and for the many near and far in Light and love.

Dear Friends—In the cold of winter, let us know the fire within, the blaze of Spirit that is the Light of all lives, of which we all partake, of which we all are a part, on which we all depend, on which all depends. Help us to share that warmth, and to make it the first and main priority in our lives and actions. Bring us the true religion of love in all its many manifestations and expressions. Continue to renew us in this new year, protect us in our times of uncertainty, and give us joyfully to one another. Let it be an epiphany of hope, Light, and Love that we all know. Amen

Our message hymn is number 241 in the green hymnal, "Lady of the Season's Laughter"

Message: Dear Friends—This is a time of year where we are used to seeking blessings, looking for new or renewed sources of hope and making new commitments for ourselves and for our families and communities. There is an element of purposeful planning in that type of thinking and action, but there is also an element of pure faith and hope. Things can be different, things can be better is implicit in these practices. This past week in the traditional Christian calendar is the time of Epiphany, and in parts of the U.S.

like Puerto Rico, it is the highest point of the Christmas season on the day of Three Kings. Our messages today are about finding that blessing of love, having that faith that all will work out, and I think that the Magi illustrate that faith. They were wealthy and wise, yet, like the disciples who were much more common people at the start of the adult ministry of Jesus, the three kings also dropped everything to follow him. In a way, they are the first disciples in that sense, and in a foreshadowing of the later parts of the Gospels. That combination of the nearby shepherds and the faraway sages spans all classes of people, all levels of understanding and education, all types of wealth, nationality, and ethnicity, and brings Christ to the whole world or the whole world to Christ. Love was born at Christmas, and at Epiphany, there is the full manifestation of that to all the world, represented by the wisest and most inciteful leaders. It is that Epiphany, that sudden realization that love is the key, is the first motion, is the way, is more important than any particular mundane or day-to-day matters, or even more important than significant studies and official responsibilities.

Luke closes the section we read for today stating, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” And the Magi are an overt illustration of this, literally bringing their treasures from their personal homes and personal ownership to the greater treasure of the expression of love, following and expressing, and being guided by that star, and that inner light. As mystics of the time period, I think the concept of “following the star” is not like the idea of following the tail lights of a vehicle in front of you or the blue track on your mapquest screen, or the instructions of a guide, but of aligning yourself with your inner compass. All of us can follow that star, can listen to the promptings of love in our hearts, and confirm its reality with traveling companions of like mind and wisdom. We can notice that birth as it happens every day, in every garden of beauty, in every meal of sustenance, feeling the warmth

of the fire in the warmth of the heated water. It is in this way that our inner light, our love, becomes the saving ark of Noah, the sacred ladder of Mohammed, the healing breath of Jesus, the staff of Moses. It's in every one of us to be wise, to be wise Magi, to recognize the signs and wonders, to have the Epiphany.

The wise ones ventured into the world, away from their security and their strength, beyond their knowledge and towards the sacred and the greater unknown together, and as the shepherds observed, let us run to love. Their way may have passed through the ancient faiths of love, of Zoroaster and Ishtar, of the gazelle in nature and the monk in the cloister, into Torah and the still being written Gospel and Koran. The universe was speaking in the stars and through the Light. It still speaks in you.

The Egypt that sheltered the young Christ is the same Egypt that sheltered and educated the young Moses, and is the same Egypt that nurtured the young church and its first Popes in its thousands of years of wisdom, of the cycles of the earth, the turning ages of the Lady's wisdom. We are caught so much in the cares of the world in these days, the enormous concerns of great crises, of huge demands and direct threats. It is all the more that in order not to worry, to be not overwhelmed, we must raise our eyes to the heavens, go beyond daily bread and the needs of clothing and shelter to the broader essentials of life, to the meaning of life, to the prophet of Love. In the modern understanding of psychology, of the damage caused by the lack of Love, the trauma of the unloved child or adult that leads to so much conflict and violence, so much misunderstanding and hurt, there is the recognition that to have a balanced and understanding life of Light, there must be Love. What good are food and clothing and shelter to those without Love? All the riches in the world will not heal that lack.

Who is searching for meaning and how in our contemporary world?

And so the Magi went on their journey, as do we all. I think of the line from a common carol, “Led by the Light of faith serenely beaming..” and I also think of the similar practice among Tibetan Buddhists of having wise men find the baby who is the next incarnation of the Dalai Llama. There is a discernment of Spirit, place, and people that allows for that recognition, that star to come to rest on a chosen one, and for us to find the chosen within ourselves. “Only this—will lead you to That” as Rumi wrote. He also noted that we need intermediaries, and that all the things we do and are, are mediums that hide and show what’s hidden. We come together here in worship to bring together our lenses on and in this world, to channel the love we know into a stream.

Finding love is also a way of giving love, since love is a transitive verb, not a fixed and stationary noun. It is not something until it is given away, until it is invested in one another. We transform others by loving them, and others transform us by their love. Being sought out makes us special even as someone special leads others to seek. It is essential for those who have little as well as for those with much. Follow the religion of Love and go whichever way Their camel leads.

Closing Hymn #68 in Blue “Brightest and Best”

We close with a verse from Habbakkuk: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”