

My brother Mark is four years younger than me, and I remember very well when he came home for the first time. I remember my mom being pregnant, and then all of a sudden she wasn't pregnant anymore, and now there was another bed in the large room we all slept in and this pudgy little baby was there.

And everyone was all over him- oohing and ahing, as they should, but the thing was that no one was paying any attention to me or to my two older sisters, and I don't know about them, but I did not like this new situation one bit. My poor mom already had her hands full taking care of this new baby- this new life- and she had no energy to begin with- but that didn't stop me from feeling left out and excluded, and looking back on it all, I wish I could have said to myself "*get over it!*" But what four-year-old is that self-aware- certainly not me, who was the first-born son in an Italian family, and so was the little prince, at least until this interloper came into the picture.

And my dad- who was such a good man- he sees this and he goes out of his way to give me and my sisters extra attention and every night he makes us laugh by telling us these ridiculous stories and singing with us and giving us Stella D'Oro cookies when we not supposed to have any- all the little things that told us that we were loved- that we were wanted and that we are always part of the family.

Because my dad's love for us, and my mom's love for us, was too great to have any one of us not truly know that we were wanted and we were treasured and that we were loved.

Today we remember when the Magi came to this little baby who upended the world without knowing it. The Magi were members of the priestly class in Persia who looked to the movement of the stars for clues about major events that were about to happen. They were

Gentiles, that is, that they were not of the Jewish people, but they had heard of the Jewish prophecy that a Messiah was to come into the world, a savior who would free people from oppression and would empower them to make the world as God wants it to be. So when the Magi saw a star rising that they interpreted as being a sign of the coming of the Messiah, they went to Galilee to find this newborn king- and what they found was this helpless, vulnerable infant who you would never guess would change the world.

One very powerful way that the status quo, the way things were in the world, began to be thrown upside down was by the simple method of inclusion. That the Magi were Gentiles (non-Jews) is one of the many signs within the Gospels that the Jewish people were no longer the sole heirs of the covenant that Abraham had entered into with God. Now *all* people were invited into relationship with God and *all* people were empowered to experience God's love and to then become that love for one another. And as a manifestation of this new way of being, instead of excluding and rejecting people, Jesus invited all people into God's salvation.

Jesus went out of his way to accept the people that his society ostracized- the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sick, those of different ethnic backgrounds- and He risked the rejection of His society because of that. And that was because He knew that God's love knows no boundaries and there is no reason to exclude anyone from the Kingdom of God. To anthropomorphize God just a little bit, God has infinite time and infinite energy and infinite patience and infinite love, so it's no big deal for Him to love every single one of us, whether we're new to the scene or have been around the block a few times.

By remembering that God loves all people, no matter who they are or what they have done, we can relate to one another as one child of God to another. This doesn't mean looking

past what needs to be changed and what needs to be addressed- what it does mean is that we see God within each person and allow that realization to shape how we deal with one another.

We are all sinners, we all turn away from God- and don't take this the wrong way, but we are all selfish little brats sometimes- and so we rejoice in the fact that God can love all people and not just me and my family and my tribe. We love all people because God loves them no matter what- not to condone what is wrong but to be humble enough to see that we ourselves are far from perfect and can learn to live how to live rightly just as much as they can.

And because we love them, we share the hope that is within us. We share with them what God has blessed us with and we let them know, by our words and by our actions, that they are good and holy by nature, and that we love in them what God loves in them, and what God loves in us.