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During the few days before Christmas, as I watched the snow begin to fall and listened to the weather forecast, the world seemed a bit unstable, unpredictable. I wondered, *Will snow cancel Christmas Eve? Will it be too cold for Christmas Day? Should we plan to meet for worship either day? What happens if someone slips or gets stuck on the way to church? Is it safe to get out?* So much uncertainty.

Isn't that how the arrival of a baby catches us—with uncertainty? Oh yes, we have nine months or so of preparation, but when the first baby arrives in a family, most parents discover they don't know what they are doing. How does the diaper go on? Why is he crying? How do we keep her safe? Even with all our questions, parents soon learn to love the little one who has quickly captured our hearts.

Even in all the uncertainty of the holidays this year, I reminded myself, "No matter what happens with the weather and our ability to meet for worship, nothing can stop Christmas from coming, not even a blizzard. Jesus will still be born again on

Christmas Day, even if one is sitting alone at home on a quiet snow-filled morning.

Since we could not gather to celebrate the day, this morning I invite you to imagine walking through an art gallery, celebrating scenes from the life of Jesus, beginning with his birth.

This first scene of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* comes from Dutch painter Mattias Stom, painted in 1632. Mary and the shepherds are gathered around Jesus. Notice the bright light coming from the baby, which may relate to an infancy story of Jesus in writings not included in the Bible that said when visitors came to see the baby, the place "was all filled with lights, greater than the light of lamps and candles, and, greater than the light of the sun itself."<sup>1</sup>

As we gaze at this piece of artwork, we place the sacred baby among us and hear a musical form of art as bells play "Away in a Manger" and "Infant Lowly." (*Place baby and handbells play.*)

Italian painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti painted a scene of Jesus' presentation in the temple when



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Simeon and Anna saw the child and praised God as his parents dedicated Jesus to God. This painting was created for a Cathedral in Spain 1342.



Matthew's Gospel tells how Magi traveled from a long distance to greet the child in a house after seeing a bright object in the sky. As you gaze at this Nigerian oil painting done in 1948 by Father Kevin Carroll, notice the unique gifts brought by the travelers. As we light the star, imagine what gifts you might offer at this amazing birth. (*Light star*)



The Bible makes a jump in time to the story of Jesus as a young boy traveling with his family to the temple, as depicted in this ivory Spanish-Filipino carving from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. When the family began their journey home, Jesus somehow managed to remain behind, meeting in study with the elders at the temple.

As we wander through this virtual art gallery, you might notice the variety of artwork coming from numerous places around the world celebrating the birth of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Not even our wintry blizzard could keep this event from happening, for Christ's

presence surrounds the globe, embracing all of humanity.

The Bible once again seems silent for many years of Jesus' life until a sudden appearance by the river as the adult Jesus entered the waters of baptism. His cousin John had been inviting people into the water, signaling their desire to turn away from sin and division to find healing. The painting *The Baptism of the Christ with Dove* by contemporary artist Daniel Bonnell shows Jesus emerging from the water with the dove above him. It's almost as though Jesus is leaping out of the painting and into the observer's life.



Jesus' baptism highlights his appearance in the world as we begin this season of Epiphany, a Greek word meaning "manifestation" or "to reveal." When Jesus entered the world, he revealed something about God—something that had been there all along, but we needed a reminder of God's nature.

Think back to the scenes from our virtual art museum and how they remind us of God: First, being born in a manger, where animals fed, and appearing to shepherds, common workers in the



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field, reminds us that Jesus comes to ordinary people. He came as a light to show us what God looks like, a God of love who cares for those often ignored. As an adult, Jesus would continue reaching out to those who were ill or outcasts.

The next three scenes suggest that we keep our eyes open, notice God among us, and continue seeking, for the second scene reminds us to recognize the presence of Jesus among us, just as Simeon and Anna did. The third one reminds us that sometimes we discover God's presence after a long journey like the magi. In the fourth scene, the story of Jesus at the temple reminds us to seek wisdom through study and to recognize that even a young child may have an intuitive understanding of God.

And finally, in our fifth scene, Jesus entered the waters of baptism along with all those seeking forgiveness of sins, proclaiming their desire to turn around and repent and follow God's ways. Jesus'

entrance into the same waters reminds us that he stands with us in the waters of chaos, that he knows the struggles and temptations of being human.

I suggest that's what God has been trying to reveal throughout history, even long before Jesus arrived—that God is with us in our struggles and loves us deeply. Sometimes we have a hard time grasping just how much God loves us, but God continues to remind us over and over again. The ultimate way of getting a message to us was to arrive in human form, to be born in a common manger, to walk among us, to offer wisdom, to teach us the ways of God.

May this Epiphany of Art continue to remind you that Christmas *did* come this year and comes to us day after day, for Christ is born among us each time we offer a glimpse of God's light by offering kindness and generosity. May you reflect that light each day during this new year.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.interfaith.org/christianity/apocrypha-first-infancy-gospel-of-jesus/](http://www.interfaith.org/christianity/apocrypha-first-infancy-gospel-of-jesus/)

<sup>2</sup> See more artwork at <https://cultivatedlearning.org/nativity-art-around-the-world/>