***“Are We There Yet?”***

***Arguing About People Who Do Not Exist - Not Caring About Those Who Did.***

I recently overheard an argument that was filled with an amazing amount of data about the subjects in the argument. The spirited debate included birthdates, siblings, and alleged accomplishments. Since I appreciate people caring about details related to historical figures, I listened more carefully. The individuals were arguing about Super Heroes, that is characters who have never existed except in comic books and movies. This is, of course, a problem that exists when we are inundated with media - people begin to believe that these characters actually exist.

Today my mind goes to the Wise Men traveling to Bethlehem by following a Star and bearing gifts. Of course, many legends have been created regarding this extraordinary event, but some skeptics know more about Superman than they do about Jesus, and when they are faced with the Gospel, they enjoy pointing out what they see as inconsistencies in the Bible. Sadly, since many of these skeptics have never read the Bible, they read other skeptics who point out matters like: were there Three or not? Were they Kings or not? Were they three specific Races or not? Did it really take Twelve Days to make the trip or not? The list goes one, and I am happy to say that over the years since my childhood I have read almost all of the assertions and almost all of the objections. The problem is that to argue over the inconsistencies or theories or details is to miss the whole point. What we do have on our side as Christians, unlike comic book aficionados is that our texts have stood the test of time of Two Thousand years, and while we love seeing the alleged names of Three Kings/Wisemen we know that the point is that the Messiah who was seen by most as an answer to Jewish prayers came to save the entire world - not just Jews. The Wise Men (Magi: kind of astrologer, astronomer, “priest” types) were not Jewish and they understood the signs. In fact recent studies of the “Star of Bethlehem” reveal much more than we could have ever imagined in terms of appearance and dating. Once again, the real issue is not how many there were, what they brought as gifts, what their names were, how long it took them to get there and which countries they claimed as “home.” The real issue is that non-Jews came and worshiped Jesus Christ. All of the glamorous details make Epiphany Pageants much more fun but once again the real issue is that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God came to save everyone. If God created all things would He have come to save only a portion of His creation? Was sin a state only for the Jewish people? (Stay tuned for February 2.)

I know…….the details are fun, and I love looking at the significance of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh and representatives of various Races, but in the Mind of God….all of His children are in need of His presence and His grace. When I let my mind wander, though, knowing human nature as we do, I wonder what the Magi talked about (if they could understand each other’s language) as they traveled to Bethlehem. What did they expect? What did they share with each other as they traveled. What did they do to occupy their minds as they made the trip?

I will let others debate non-Biblical details (which I enjoy) but what I simply do not understand is why so many of the modern Christian Churches, formed in the last few hundred years, do not celebrate the entirety of the Christmas story which includes the Manifestation of Christ to non-Jews. Why is January 6 not celebrated in so many churches? Why is it transferred sometimes to other days when for millennia we have celebrated the Twelve Days, and why for those of us who do celebrate January 6, do so many of our own churches do nothing on that day? How do we expect to teach others if we ourselves do not keep those days? As I study the societal trends and the predictions of what Christianity will look like 100 years from now (if Jesus has not yet returned by then) I am intrigued as I discover new generations wishing to return to those Liturgies and Feast Days and Celebrations that have been dismissed or compromised by my generation. You and I are the “keepers of the coals” and I fear that all too often we allow the world to blow out the flames for which many in the past have died. I do not fear those who are robbing us of our Faith. I fear those of us who allow it to happen.